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101 WORLD'S GREATEST CASTLES

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ALL ABOUT HISTORY

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101 WORLD'S GREATEST CASTLES

Everyone loves a castle – how could you not? Centuries of history are packed into one complex, and each is wonderfully unique. Some were owned by counts, others the highest echelons of royalty. Some served as prisons with infamous inmates, while others were stately homes with beautiful banqueting halls and bedrooms. All are fascinating.

In All About History 101 Greatest Castles, it's time to uncover the best of the best from around the world. From South Africa and Japan to France and Romania, go behind the fortifications to find out the true stories behind Dracula's home and the namesake of the House of Windsor. Meet the ghosts of haunted castles, and walk the halls of some of history's most iconic buildings.

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101 WORLD'S GREATEST CASTLES

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Printed by William Gibbons, 26 Planetary Road,
Willenhall, West Midlands, WV13 3XT

Distributed by Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU
www.marketforce.co.uk Tel: 0203 787 9001

All About History 101 World's Greatest Castles First Edition
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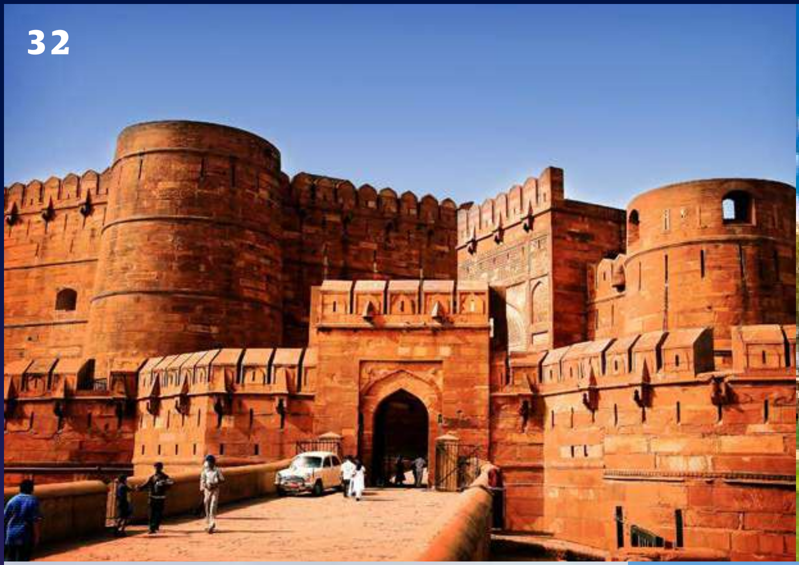

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101 GREATEST CASTLES

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101 WORLD'S GREATEST CASTLES

NEUSCHWANSTEIN CASTLE

INTENDED AS A RETREAT FROM THE PRESSURES OF COURT, THIS BEAUTIFUL CASTLE SOUNDED THE DEATH KNELL FOR LUDWIG II OF BAVARIA

BAVARIA
GERMANY

NUMBER

01

WORDS BY • PHILIPPA GRAFTON

ENTRY FEE
ADULTS €13; CHILDREN FREE
OPENING HOURS
APRIL – 15 OCTOBER 9AM-6PM;
16 OCTOBER – MARCH 10AM-4PM
WEBSITE
WWW.NEUSCHWANSTEIN.DE

Surrounded by luscious green forests, idyllic lakes and the snowy mountainous peaks of the Bavarian Alps, you'll find Neuschwanstein Castle. Once the fantasy retreat of a king deemed too insane to rule, it has since become one of the most popular tourist destinations in Europe.

Built by Ludwig II of Bavaria, the castle was more than just a show of royal wealth: it was to serve as a sanctuary from courtly life, providing the king with welcome respite. This haven from his capital was a labour of love for Ludwig, who embraced the legends and lore of the Medieval period in its design and decoration. Yet despite the determination and devotion that Ludwig poured into Neuschwanstein, the castle brought nothing but misfortune to its creator. Ludwig's pet project turned on him, with its spiralling costs and never-ending construction leading to the king's ultimate deposition and eventually his death.

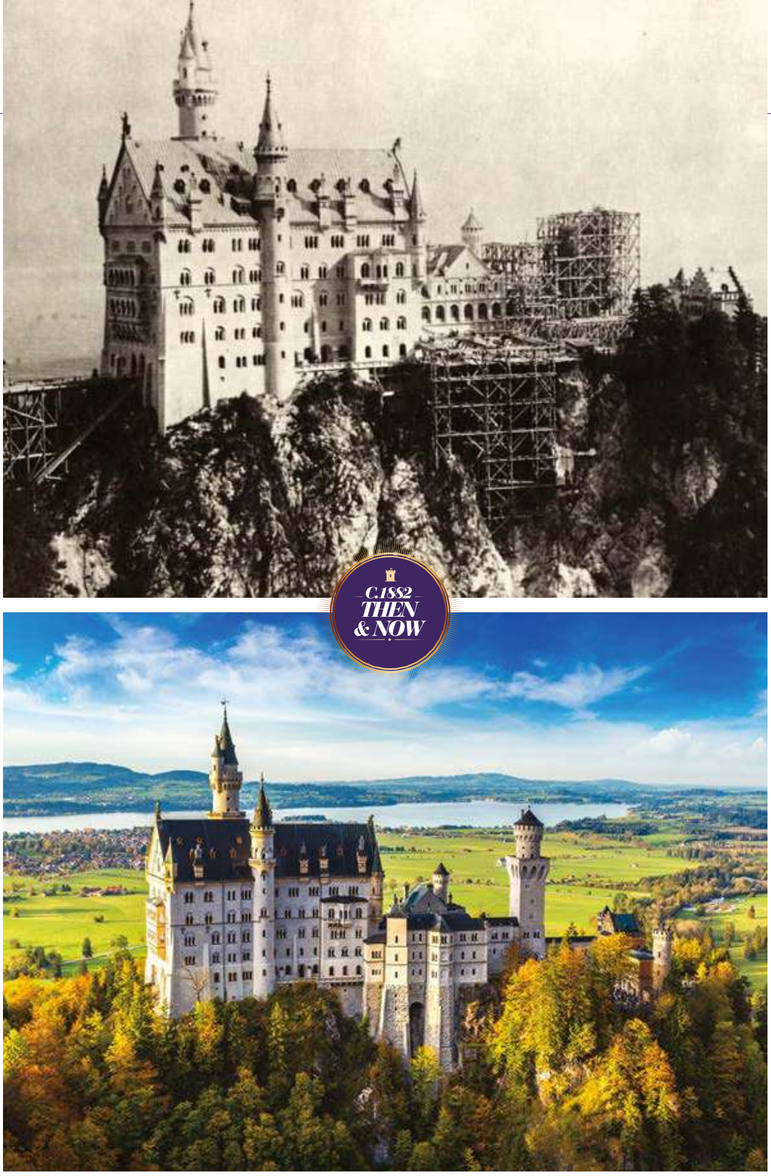
Born on 25 August 1845 at Nymphenburg Palace in Munich, Ludwig II was the first son to Maximillian, the heir to the Bavarian throne. Merely three years after the birth of his son, Maximillian was crowned king after his father's abdication, with Ludwig taking the role as crown prince. Throughout Ludwig's youth, his status as a royal was at the forefront of his upbringing: he was spoilt, yet he was forbidden the freedom of other children. It was this controlled childhood that left him distant and unattached to his parents – in later life, he referred to his mother as his "predecessor's consort".

He might not have had a strong bond with his parents, but Ludwig shared a strong connection with his grandfather, the eccentric and philandering Ludwig I. As well as sharing a name, the two Ludwigs also shared the same birthday and a passion for culture. While the former king was passionate about arts and poetry, the future king began on his own path towards his lifelong enthusiasm for architecture.

Most of the crown prince's childhood was spent in his father's castle, Hohenschwangau, a modest but fantastical building near the Austrian border. It was decorated with Germanic sagas, overlooking the landscape and the Schwansee – known in English as the Swan Lake. It was from Hohenschwangau that Ludwig first laid eyes on the ruinous fort where he was to build Neuschwanstein, his dream of his own fairy tale fortress to be realised nearly 30 years later.

^ **Ludwig planned the design of the castle with the help of Edward Riedel, an architect, and Christian Jank, a theatrical set designer**

Ludwig's dreams soon took a different direction when he discovered the works of Richard Wagner. Aged 15, Ludwig saw Wagner's opera *Lohengrin* for the first time in Munich. He was hooked. Later that year, he saw *Tännhauser*. It was the start of an unwavering, life-long passion for the composer and his works. Ludwig vowed that his first act as king of



Bavaria would be to summon the composer to his court.

Just three years later, aged 18, Ludwig fulfilled his wish. After the sudden death of his father on 10 March 1864, the young prince was thrust onto the throne and crowned King Ludwig II of Bavaria. The new monarch might have been popular with his people thanks to his charm and good looks, but when it came to power and politics, Ludwig was out of his depth. His first act as king, as promised, was to summon Wagner to his court, where he settled the composer's significant debts and staged several of his operas. In June 1865, *Tristan and Isolde* premiered in Munich, but by December the composer had been forced to flee Bavaria after a conflict with the government. Devastated, Ludwig II had intended to abdicate until Wagner convinced him to stay.

Ludwig II, pictured c.1874. Tall and slender, he was thought to be a very handsome prince

Wagner's influence reached much further than simply commanding the king to keep his crown. Ludwig dedicated Neuschwanstein to his friend, and each room of the castle was decorated with the legends that had inspired some of Wagner's most famous operas. The saga of *Tristan and Isolde*, for instance, graced the walls of Ludwig's bedroom, while the 1882 opera *Parsifal* is spread across the singer's hall. The salon, meanwhile, features the character that Ludwig identified with the most: Lohengrin, the swan knight. Tragically, however, Wagner never got to see the finished

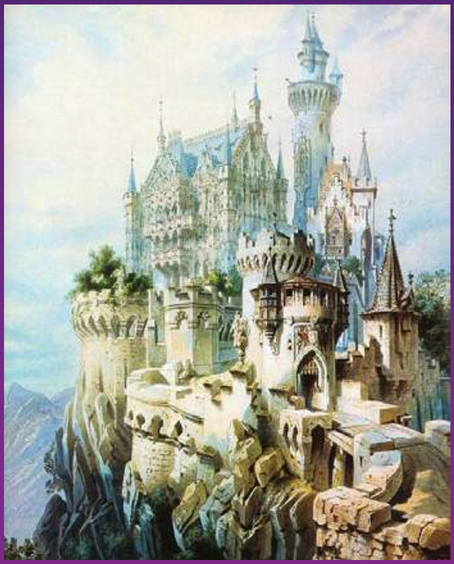
THE CASTLE THAT NEVER WAS

WITH NEUSCHWANSTEIN NEARING COMPLETION, LUDWIG II TURNED HIS SIGHTS TO A NEW SANCTUARY

Neuschwanstein was Ludwig II's prized project, but the looming towers and Alpine setting only served to underwhelm the king. Instead, he began to plan a brand-new fantasy retreat to sate his desire for a dramatic, imposing castle overlooking his land.

The ruins of Falkenstein Castle, merely 20 kilometres from Füssen, provided the perfect location for Ludwig's vision of a spectacular castle that towered above the land. In 1883, Ludwig purchased the ruin, intent on demolishing it and replacing it with his new fairy tale fortress. He commissioned Neuschwanstein's concept artist and stage designer, Christian Jank, to come up with its architecture. Jank returned with a menacing, high-Gothic palace made of towers, turrets and steep roofs. Ludwig deemed his designs too modest, however, and recommissioned its design to Max Schultze, who designed both the exterior and interior of the castle.

In 1885, service lines were made to provide road and water access to the castle, but tragedy struck once more. Schultz resigned from his position and the design of Falkenstein was once again handed over. This time, architects Julius Hoffmann and Eugen Drollinger took the job. Their designs were both incredible and completely idealistic: just what Ludwig wanted. However, upon the king's untimely demise in 1886, all work on the concept and construction of Falkenstein ground to a halt, never to be continued. The 13th-century ruin remains to this day.


Despite purchasing the ruin in 1883, Ludwig II died before the original Falkenstein castle could be demolished

castle as he died of a heart attack in June 1883.

From the start of his reign, Ludwig had been a recluse. He abhorred formal engagements, public events and banquets, preferring instead to focus his attentions on his creative projects. By 1868, Ludwig I had died and the wealth that the deposed king had kept was finally available to his grandson. The same year, Ludwig II commissioned concept art from Wagner's stage designer, Christian Jank, for Neuschwanstein and Herrenchiemsee. One year later, the foundation of Neuschwanstein was laid, with the previous ruins that stood on the spot demolished. Work on Neuschwanstein would continue until the death of Ludwig II and beyond, but the king lived to see at least one of his creations through to completion.

The palace of Linderhof was completed in 1878 at the total cost of about 8.5 million marks, whereupon Ludwig started work on his interpretation of Versailles at Herrenchiemsee. Only the central portion of his replica was completed by the time of his death, but the cost had already soared to more than 16 million marks. It remains incomplete to this day. Ludwig II was so involved in every stage of creating the palaces – from concept to completion – that the design of each palace has been attributed to the king himself.

His isolation frustrated his government and he became highly unpopular among his ministers, yet he always had the favour of his subjects. The king would often travel across his land, talk with locals and reward hospitality kindly. After the unification of Germany in 1871, Ludwig's reclusive nature became a force of its own. Work on Neuschwanstein had already commenced, but it quickly became the king's pride and joy. A daydreamer, he saw a way to realise his fantasies in a way that would shield him from his constitutional duties. The sagas that inspired the operas of Wagner adorned the walls, but the castle was as much a declaration of Ludwig's divine right to rule as it was a celebration of the king's closest friend.

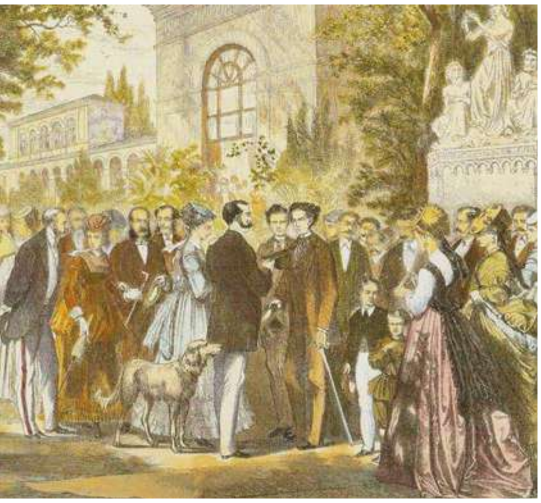
The two largest 'state rooms' of the castle – the throne room and the singers' hall – proved to be Ludwig II's favourites, and while neither were intended to actually host guests, both rooms had entirely different purposes. The throne room, ornately decorated in the style of a Byzantine church, channelled Ludwig's belief in his god-given kingship, while the singers' hall served to commemorate the Medieval legends that so inspired Wagner's work. Likewise, every room in Ludwig's personal apartment was embellished with murals.

The inside of Neuschwanstein was never meant to be seen by anyone other than Ludwig II and his servants. Guests were never invited to the retreat, let alone banquets or courtly events. The castle was only big enough to serve Ludwig and his staff – there was only enough space for the king's living apartments, state rooms and servant quarters. On the outside, it was an extravagant symbol of the king's power and position; on the inside it was a shrine to the masterpieces of Ludwig's late lifetime companion.

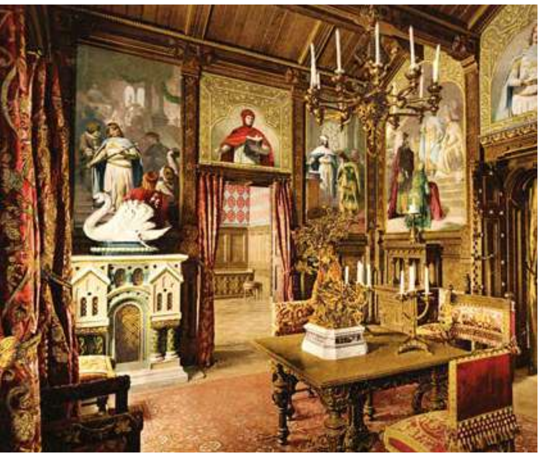
Despite its expense, Neuschwanstein served as the chief employment of the region for

While Medieval on the outside, the castle was state of the art inside

“FACED WITH A REFORMED NATION AND REDUCED POWER, LUDWIG RETREATED ALMOST ENTIRELY FROM HIS COURTLY LIFE”



King Ludwig II meeting Tsar Alexander II of Russia and other VIP guests



The dining room was fitted with a lift so that food could be carried quicker

over a decade, with well-able men needed to build the looming castle. The construction usually required 200 men at any one time, though for particularly tight deadlines an additional 100 men would be called in, sometimes working through the night to meet their objectives. Also, the number of workers on Neuschwanstein didn't include the specialist craftsmen who were hired to craft the stone, marble or wood. In a show of compassion and humanity that belonged to a later century, Ludwig ensured that his workers were insured and provided a generous pension for the few casualties of construction (remarkably, only 30 were listed).

As well as strong, healthy men to work on building the exterior, the castle included some remarkably

LUDWIG'S MYSTERIOUS END

FORMER PROSECUTOR AND CRIME HISTORIAN ANN MARIE ACKERMANN CONSIDERS THE CASE OF LUDWIG II'S DEATH

Mere days after being declared insane, the lifeless bodies of Ludwig II and his psychiatrist were found floating in the water on the shores of Lake Starnberg. American prosecutor and crime historian Ann Marie Ackermann (annmarieackermann.com) explains why Ludwig's demise divides experts to this day.

What's so mysterious about Ludwig's death? How was his body found?

Because no one witnessed an unexpected double death, Ludwig's demise remains shrouded in mystery. Bavaria had just deposed Ludwig II for insanity and confined him in a castle on Lake Starnberg. He and his psychiatrist took a walk along the lake. They never returned. Hours later, a search party found their bodies floating in shallow water. Although gendarmes were patrolling the park, none saw or heard anything.

What are the theories?

The government's version of the story was suicide. Ludwig, despondent about the loss of his crown, dashed into the lake to drown himself. The psychiatrist followed him to stop him. Younger and stronger, Ludwig overpowered the doctor and killed him before letting himself drown.

Some Bavarians think Ludwig was murdered. Either there was a conspiracy to remove him, or Ludwig was shot in an attempt to escape. The two men might have entered the water with any of those motives in mind, but then died of a heart attack.

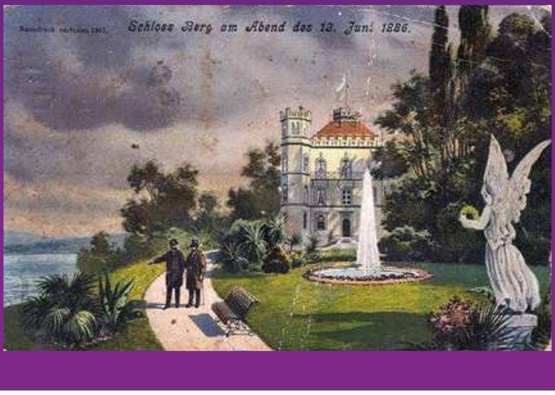
Is there any evidence to prove any of these theories?

The evidence is ambiguous, and that's what makes this case so fascinating. The facts perform a balancing act between theories, so even today, experts disagree. Ludwig's autopsy didn't reveal a cause of death. No water entered his lungs and physicians couldn't find a fatal injury. No autopsy was performed on the psychiatrist. Examination of the lake bed revealed several sets of footprints, some indicating a struggle between two people, but interpretation of the prints might not be reliable. A storm scoured Lake Starnberg the night Ludwig died, so wave action might have obliterated any other evidence.

Curiously, the psychiatrist's pocket watch stopped 72 minutes after Ludwig's. Was one of the watches too fast or slow? Was the doctor's watch more waterproof? Or did the doctor expire 72 minutes later, contradicting the government's theory? Experts disagree even today. Some evidence suggests that the search party was required to swear an oath of secrecy, which suggests a conspiracy, and if this is true, then other evidence might have been faked.

What do you think happened?

I'm suspicious. Drowning victims usually sink, especially when fully clothed like these two men were. Dry drowning - suffocation without water entering the lungs - is possible, but it's uncommon enough that law enforcement agencies are advised to consider other causes of death in case of a freshly dead body floating in water. In this case, there were two!


Schloss Berg am Abend des 13. Juni 1886.

A postcard depicting the fateful moments before Ludwig II's mysterious demise

THE FAIRY TALE CASTLE AT WAR

AS COUNTRIES CRUMBLED DURING WORLD WAR II, NEUSCHWANSTEIN BECAME THE CULTURAL HUB OF NAZI GERMANY

The end of World War II in 1945 was supposed to be the end of Neuschwanstein Castle. Filled to the brim with looted art and Nazi plunder, it represented much more than just a hideout for stolen goods - it was the beating heart of the Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce, known in German as the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg.

The ERR, as it was known, was responsible for tracking down and confiscating valuable books, artwork and cultural items from those of Jewish heritage. The ultimate aim was to create Hitler's dream of a Führermuseum in Linz, Austria, housing Nazi art obtained through confiscation, stealing and acquisition. To counteract the ERR, the Allies set up the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives program. Those working under this banner were known as the Monuments Men. From 1943, the 400-strong Monuments Men were tasked with protecting cultural property and restoring important artefacts that were looted by the Nazis.

Situated far from Berlin, or any large city that could be bombed, Neuschwanstein proved to be the perfect location to house stolen goods. Yet with the war all but lost for the Nazis, the prospect of losing their plunder to Allied forces seemed unbearable. Rather than let it fall into enemy hands, the order was given to an SS-gruppenführer to blow up the castle in April 1945. The SS general must have appreciated culture much more than his higher ups; he chose instead to surrender the castle and its contents to the Allied Monuments Men.

It's a good thing that the plans to blow up Neuschwanstein never came to fruition. As well as being a cultural symbol of Bavaria, it was home to one of the largest stashes of plunder, with over 6,000 items inside.

Allied soldiers pose with artwork that was looted and stored at Neuschwanstein during the war

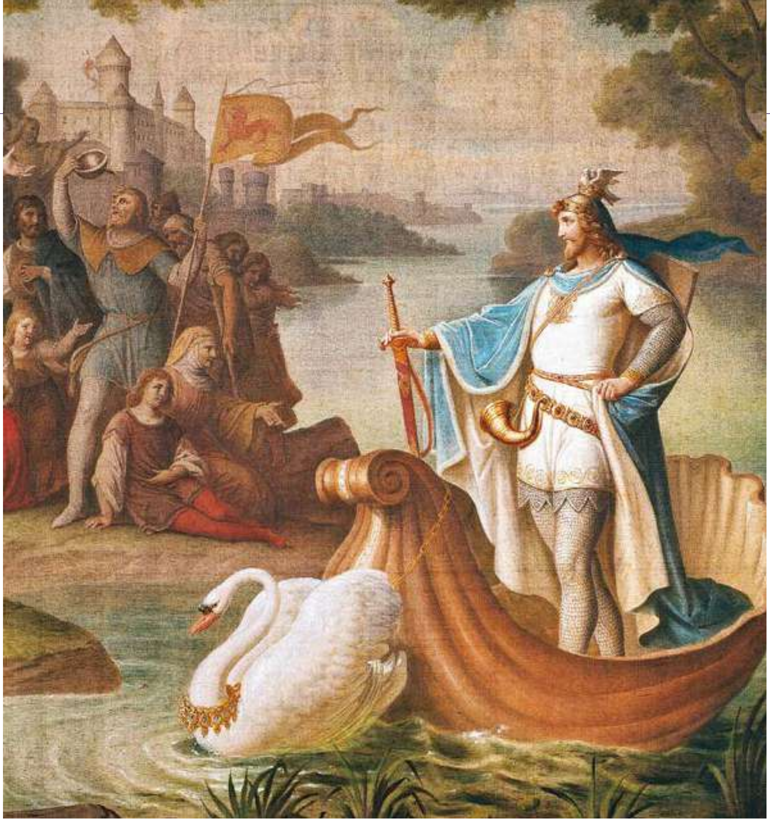
^
The inside was never meant to be seen by anyone other than the king

Each of the rooms throughout the castle were covered in tributes to Wagner

innovative features that required skilled workers to be sent to Bavaria. It might have been Medieval in appearance, but its state-of-the-art features made it one of the most modern castles of its time. Water was supplied from a spring merely 200 metres above the castle, which gave the castle running water. The kitchens featured taps for both cold and hot water, while the bathrooms had the first automatically flushing toilets of any castle.

The innovations didn't stop at water, however. The residential area of the castle boasted central heating in all of the rooms, while there were telephones built into two floors. The kitchen - which was state of the art in its own respect, with its warming plates, roasting oven and fish tank - was located on the ground floor, while the dining room was on the third floor. A lift was installed to make delivering food for the king even easier, while an electric bell system throughout the castle meant that Ludwig II could summon his servants at any time.

However, all of these innovations required money. Initially expected



***The Arrival of Lohengrin in Antwerp*, a painting from the walls of Neuschwanstein by August von Heckel**

to cost 3.2 million marks, the money needed for Neuschwanstein and Ludwig's other palaces quickly spiralled out of control. The Swan King funded his creations from his own pocket, but soon there was nothing there for him to reach for. He began borrowing money to continue construction. By 1883, he owed 7 million marks. Threatening suicide if his palaces were confiscated, Ludwig managed to continue construction of Neuschwanstein, the cost of which rapidly escalated to 6.2 million marks.

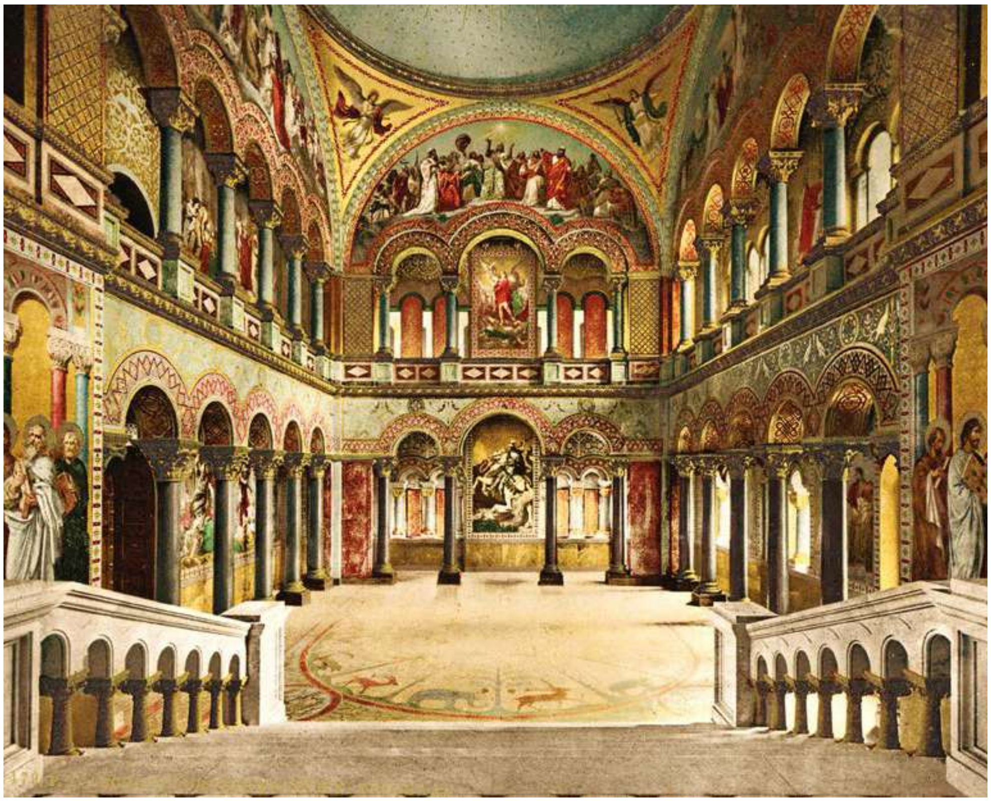
His funding might not have come from his government's treasury, but his excessive spending was a sore spot for his politicians. As work continued on Neuschwanstein, despite its creator's bankruptcy, resentment grew in government. It wasn't just the excessive spending that caused their frustration, however. Ludwig had been devastated by Bavaria's loss of independence and unification with the other regions under the new German state. In 1871, he had openly opposed the coronation of Wilhelm I as emperor, refusing to attend the ceremony and sending his brother and uncle instead. The anti-gay laws of Prussia that had been implemented across the new Germany now constricted Ludwig, who was openly homosexual. Faced with a reformed nation and reduced power, he retreated almost entirely from his courtly life.

Ludwig's politicians sought a means to oust their reclusive king. By 1884, Ludwig had moved into Neuschwanstein, still incomplete, and another ruin had been bought in anticipation of constructing another castle. His compulsive spending was agreed to be a symptom of his inability to rule and so, in 1886, Ludwig II was declared insane and unfit to govern. In the early hours of 12 June 1886, a commission was sent to take Ludwig from Neuschwanstein to Berg castle. At 10.30pm the next day, the lifeless bodies of Ludwig II of Bavaria and his psychiatrist, Doctor Bernhard von Gudden, were found floating in the nearby lake. The visionary king, who had created masterpieces of Bavarian architecture, was dead, a victim of the frugality of his government.

Even in death, the Swan King was defied. Ludwig II expressly forbade that anyone had access to Neuschwanstein – it was intended to be his private retreat from his courtly demands as king. Its rooms were purely decorative, a real-life stage that was set for the final act of Ludwig's theatre of kingship. As the curtain closed on Ludwig's life, his family simplified Neuschwanstein's design, rushed it to completion, and opened up the castle to the public in an attempt to claw back some of the massive debts that Ludwig had racked up throughout the creation of his royal retreat. Of the 200 rooms planned for the castle, only 14 of them were completely finished.

Neuschwanstein was by no means the king's most expensive project – that accolade fell upon Herrenchiemsee – but it was by far the most extravagant of his existing constructions, and audiences flocked in their thousands to see its dramatic gates and to taste the sanctuary of the mad king of Bavaria.

The throne room was ornately decorated in the style of a Byzantine church



CASTLES THAT MADE HISTORY

DISCOVER THE MOST GLORIOUS EXPRESSIONS OF ARCHITECTURAL VISION FROM SOME OF THE MOST NOTORIOUS MONARCHS IN HISTORY

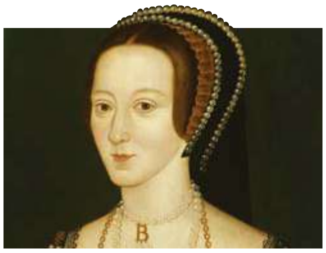
WORDS BY ◆ PHILIPPA GRAFTON

02

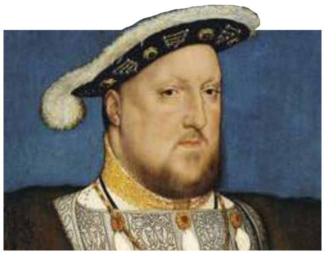
TOWER OF LONDON

LONDON, ENGLAND

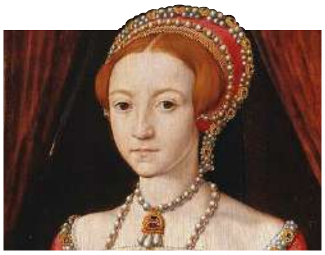
When you think of the Tower of London, what may spring to mind are the murders, imprisonments and terrible tortures that took place over the centuries, but before its grim history, the tower served as a royal residence to some of England's early-Medieval kings. By 1100, however, it had been discovered that the Tower was as good at keeping people in as it was at keeping them out, and from the 12th century to 1953, it was used as a prison. The Tower is well known for its place in much of the history of England's royalty, including the disappearance of two young princes, Edward V of England and Richard of Shrewsbury, Duke of York. Sent to the Tower by their uncle, Richard, Duke of Gloucester, the boys were the sons of the late Edward IV. The eldest, 12-year-old Edward, was crowned king, with Richard named protector. But Richard, Duke of Gloucester, made claims of illegitimacy against the princes as their father had been betrothed to



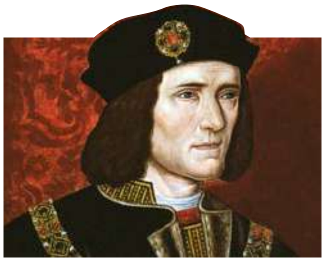
With claims of treason and incest thrown at her by the king, Anne Boleyn was beheaded in 1536



Henry VIII's unfortunate friends and foes alike often met their demise at the Tower of London



Accused of plotting against Queen Mary, Princess Elizabeth was imprisoned at the Tower in 1554



Richard III has often been accused of murdering the Princes in the Tower, but there were other likely perpetrators

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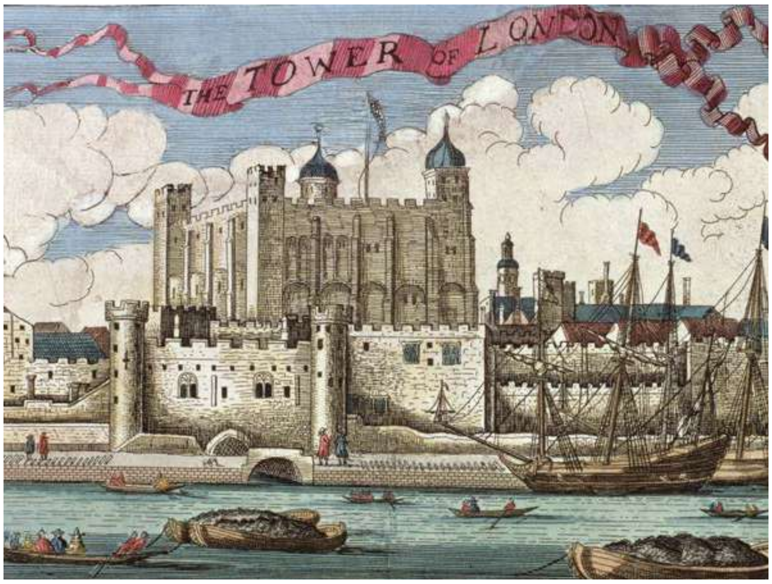
WEBSITE
WWW.HRP.ORG.UK/TOWER-OF-LONDON



another woman before he married their mother, Elizabeth Woodville. The boys were taken to live in the Tower and were never seen again.

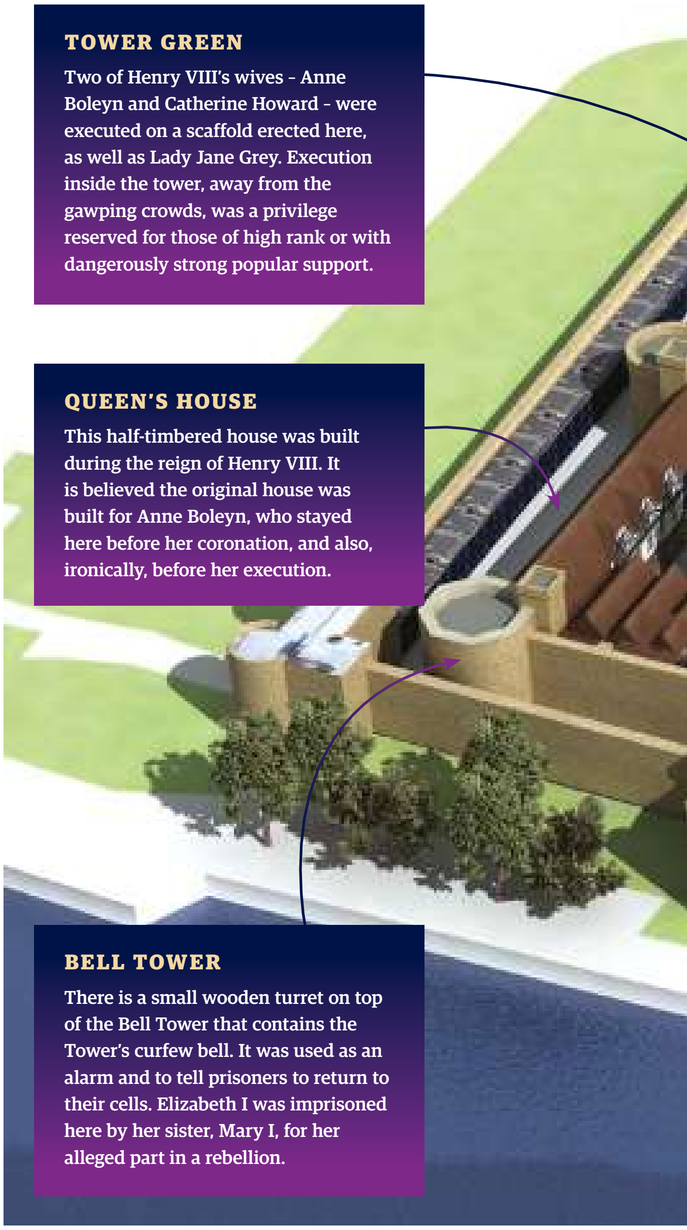
For centuries, London has thrived as the capital of England and then Britain. The city prospered, both economically and culturally, with castles, palaces and cathedrals dominating the glorious skyline. Yet underneath the mask of its civilisation lay a dirty secret, and the Tower of London was home to the darkest side of the city.

Having started life as a royal residence, the role of the Tower of London was in constant flux, having been a home, a fortress, a menagerie, a treasury and most notoriously – and consistently – a prison. Prince and pauper alike were imprisoned at the Tower from the 1100s all the way up to the 20th century. Most famously, Princess Elizabeth (later Queen Elizabeth I) was imprisoned and interrogated for her alleged involvement in the Wyatt Rebellion against Queen Mary in 1554. Her cool head and sharp wit ensured she left the Tower with her neck and her life. In fact, the Tower of London only stopped being a prison in 1952 with the imprisonment of the notorious Kray Twins. Held in the Tower for their foiled attempt to evade military service, Ronnie and Reggie were later released, soon to embark on their infamous criminal careers.

Not all prisoners were lucky enough to leave the Tower of London, however. Executions were commonplace, with public executions taking place on Tower Hill, while private and aristocratic executions were performed on the Green. Anne Boleyn's was probably the most famous execution at the Tower of London, but a long ream of other well-known figures lost their heads, including Lady Jane Grey, Sir Thomas Moore, Catherine Howard and James Scott (King Charles II's illegitimate son). Even into the 20th century, executions continued. German spies and soldiers during both World War I and World War II were killed by means of firing squad at the Tower.

Tragically, the Tower of London was used for even more sinister acts than these. Torture was a popular means of extracting information from prisoners, and the act was performed with great zeal at the Tower. Most famously, Guy Fawkes was brought there in 1605 and was tortured on the rack for his involvement in the Gunpowder Plot. Other means of torture were the manacles and the 'scavenger's daughter', which slowly contorted and crushed the human body.

The Tower of London is also thought to be the most haunted place in Britain, with spirits of the executed roaming the grounds, seeking justice for the cruelty that they faced at the hands of their captors.



TOWER GREEN

Two of Henry VIII's wives – Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard – were executed on a scaffold erected here, as well as Lady Jane Grey. Execution inside the tower, away from the gawping crowds, was a privilege reserved for those of high rank or with dangerously strong popular support.

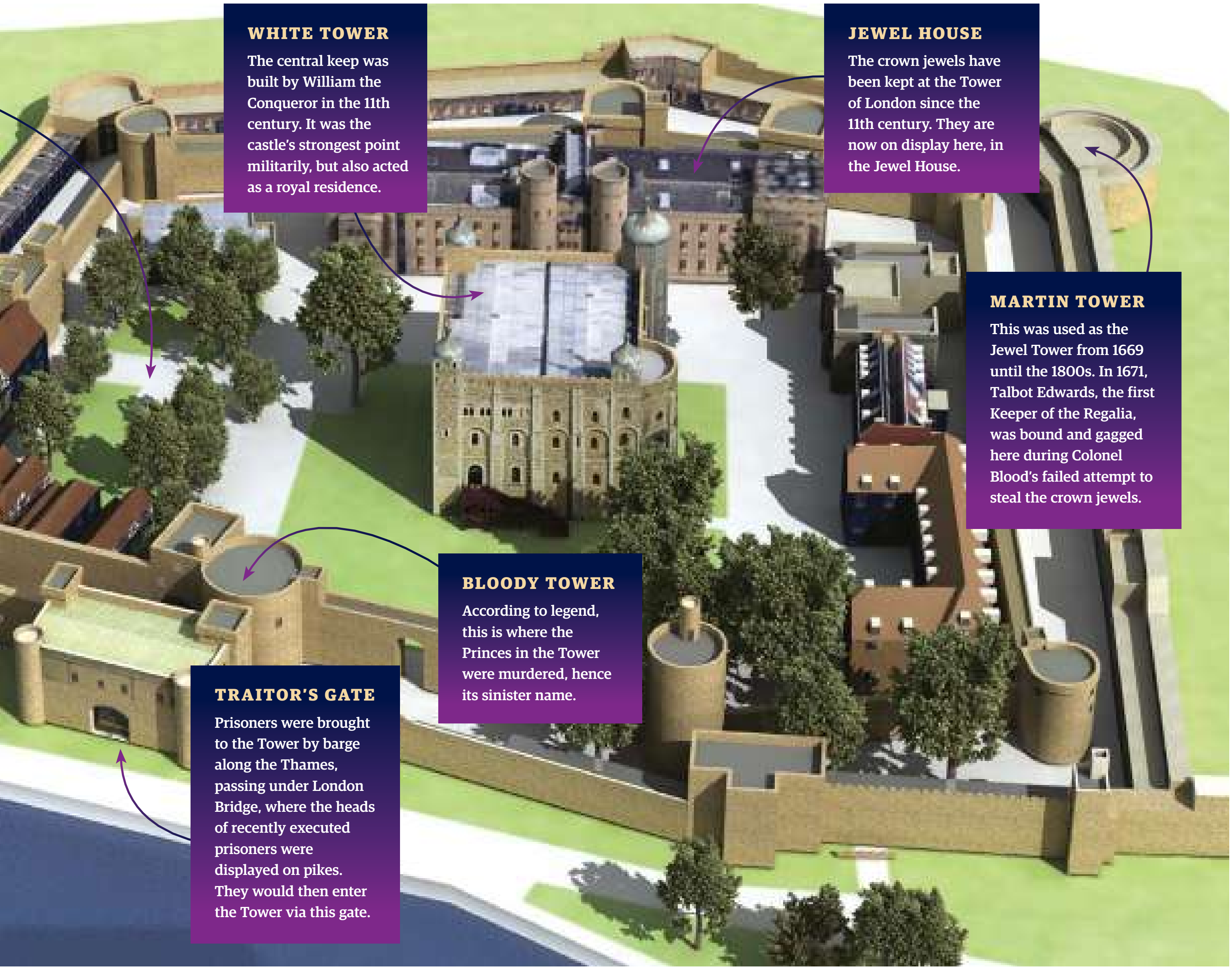
QUEEN'S HOUSE

This half-timbered house was built during the reign of Henry VIII. It is believed the original house was built for Anne Boleyn, who stayed here before her coronation, and also, ironically, before her execution.

BELL TOWER

There is a small wooden turret on top of the Bell Tower that contains the Tower's curfew bell. It was used as an alarm and to tell prisoners to return to their cells. Elizabeth I was imprisoned here by her sister, Mary I, for her alleged part in a rebellion.

With the Crown Jewels of the British monarchy held at the Tower of London, the complex is closely guarded



WHITE TOWER

The central keep was built by William the Conqueror in the 11th century. It was the castle's strongest point militarily, but also acted as a royal residence.

JEWEL HOUSE

The crown jewels have been kept at the Tower of London since the 11th century. They are now on display here, in the Jewel House.

MARTIN TOWER

This was used as the Jewel Tower from 1669 until the 1800s. In 1671, Talbot Edwards, the first Keeper of the Regalia, was bound and gagged here during Colonel Blood's failed attempt to steal the crown jewels.

BLOODY TOWER

According to legend, this is where the Princes in the Tower were murdered, hence its sinister name.

TRAITOR'S GATE

Prisoners were brought to the Tower by barge along the Thames, passing under London Bridge, where the heads of recently executed prisoners were displayed on pikes. They would then enter the Tower via this gate.

© Adrian Mann

Re-enactors bringing alive Colonel Blood's failed robbery of the Crown Jewels

Inside the Tower of London you'll also find the Royal Armouries, housing Henry VIII's suit of armour

A reconstruction of Edward I's bedroom inside the Tower's restored Medieval Palace

FASIL GHEBBI CASTLE

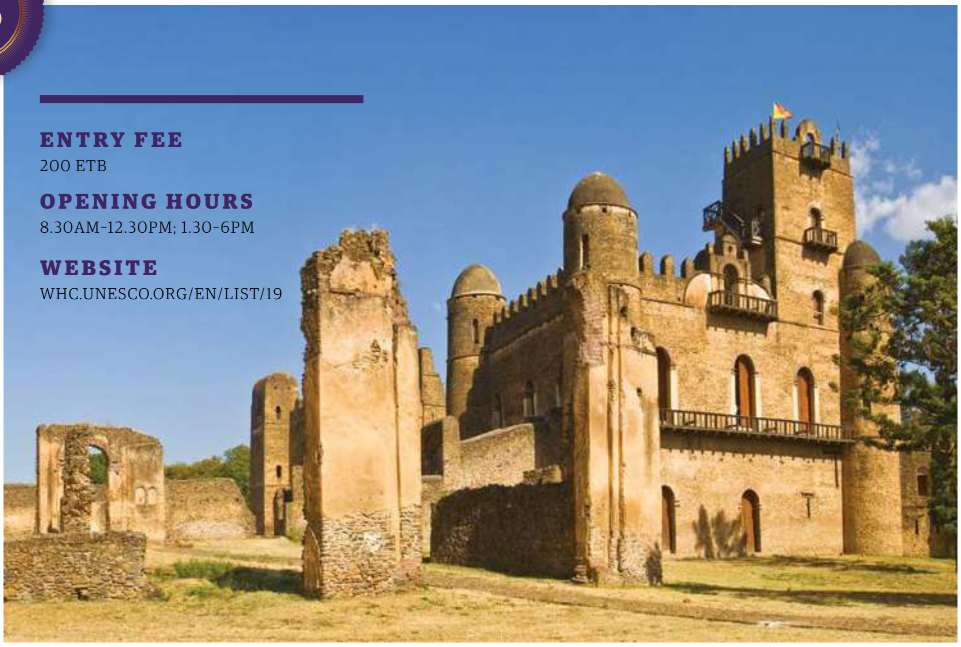
GONDAR, ETHIOPIA

03

Ethiopia might not jump to mind when you think of royal palaces, but the Fasil Ghebbi Castle is one of the finest examples of a fortress city in the world and proudly sits in the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Built in 1636 by Emperor Fasilides, the founding of Fasil Ghebbi marked a transition in the ways of Ethiopia's monarchs, who had historically travelled around the country nomadically. Instead, the emperor chose Gondar as his capital and began work on his fortress, which not only included the monarch's residence, but also temples, stables, baths and many other kinds of buildings.

In fact, each successive Ethiopian monarch brought something new to the complex, from gardens to palaces - much of which still remains today.



ENTRY FEE
200 ETB

OPENING HOURS
8.30AM-12.30PM; 1.30-6PM

WEBSITE
WHC.UNESCO.ORG/EN/LIST/19

EREMITAGESLOTTET

DYREHAVEN, DENMARK

04

ENTRY FEE
125 DKK

OPENING HOURS
SEE WEBSITE FOR GUIDED TOURS

WEBSITE
WWW.KONGELIGESLOTTE.DK/EN/PALACES-AND-GARDENS/THE-HERMITAGE.HTML

The Hermitage Hunting Lodge - or Eremitageslottet, as it's called in Danish - was built to host parties for banquets by the Danish monarchs. What stands now is actually a replacement for the original, which had been so poorly built that it was uninhabitable by 1734. Torn down, it was replaced with Christian VI's design. The lodge underwent renovation after renovation for centuries after its construction. One of its final renovations in the 1890s saw the lodge restored to its original decor throughout.

TINTAGEL CASTLE

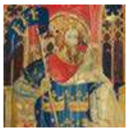
CORNWALL, ENGLAND

05

ENTRY FEE
ADULTS £13; CHILDREN £7.80

OPENING HOURS
WEDNESDAY – SUNDAY 10AM–4PM

WEBSITE
WWW.ENGLISH-HERITAGE.ORG.UK/VISIT/PLACES/TINTAGEL-CASTLE



The castle most associated with the legends of King Arthur (left), Merlin and the Round Table, Tintagel's history is believed to stem as far back as Roman Britain, although the castle itself was only known to have been inhabited from the early-Medieval period. Believed to have been built by Richard, Earl of Cornwall, sometime in the 13th century, the construction of the castle was allegedly an attempt by the outsider to gain the trust of locals. As the popularity of Arthurian legends grew in the Victorian era, so did fascination with Tintagel Castle.

BUDA CASTLE

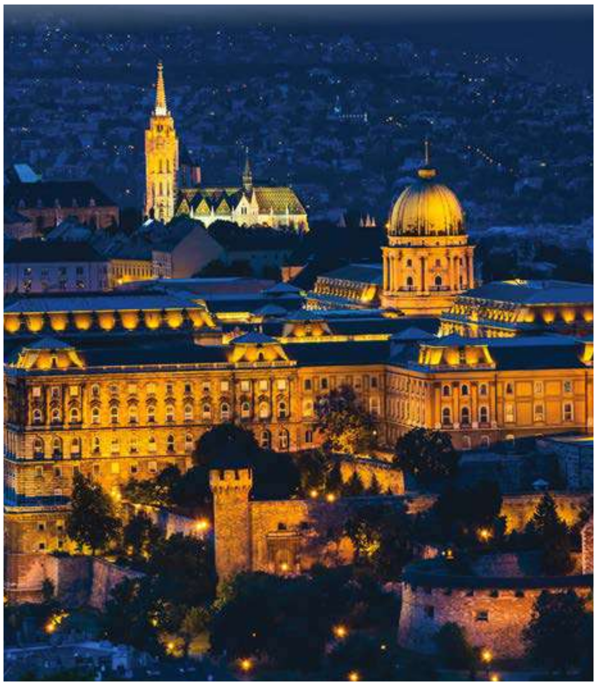
BUDAPEST, HUNGARY

06

ENTRY FEE
SEE WEBSITE FOR DETAILS

OPENING HOURS
SEE WEBSITE FOR DETAILS

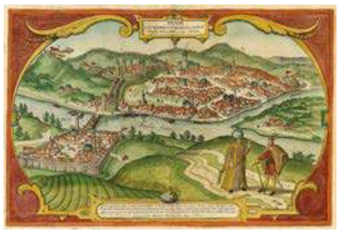
WEBSITE
WWW.BUDACASTLEBUDAPEST.COM



Originally built in the 13th century, the first royal residence on Castle Hill in Budapest became a hub of culture, with craftsmen and artists alike flocking to the court of King Matthias Corvinus and his wife, Beatrix of Naples. Tragically this original castle was destroyed, but in its place a small, Baroque castle was built. However, this too was burned down accidentally in 1723.

Derelict and abandoned, the public was called upon to raise money to restore the castle to its former glory. Money was raised, plans for the new castle were sketched, and the foundations were laid in 1749. However, fate was not kind to the castle, and work stopped when money ran out in 1758. It would take seven years before work continued on the castle after Queen Maria Theresa allocated a small budget for the work to continue. Finally, in 1769, the castle was completed.

Buda Castle was home to royals until the monarchy was abolished in 1918 in the aftermath of World War I.

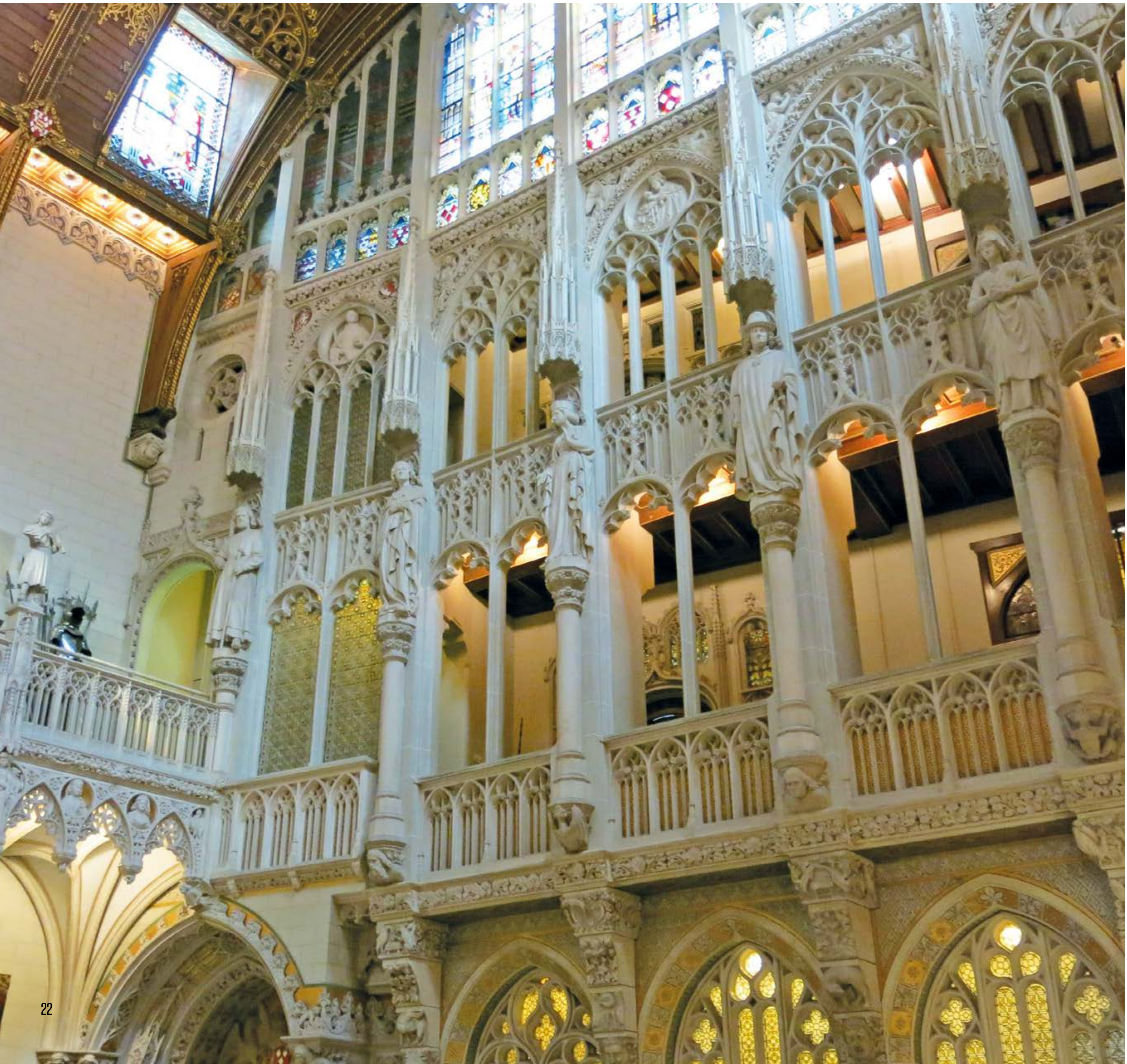


This map of Budapest dates from 1617, and shows the castle as it stood before its destruction and rebuilding

NUMBER

07

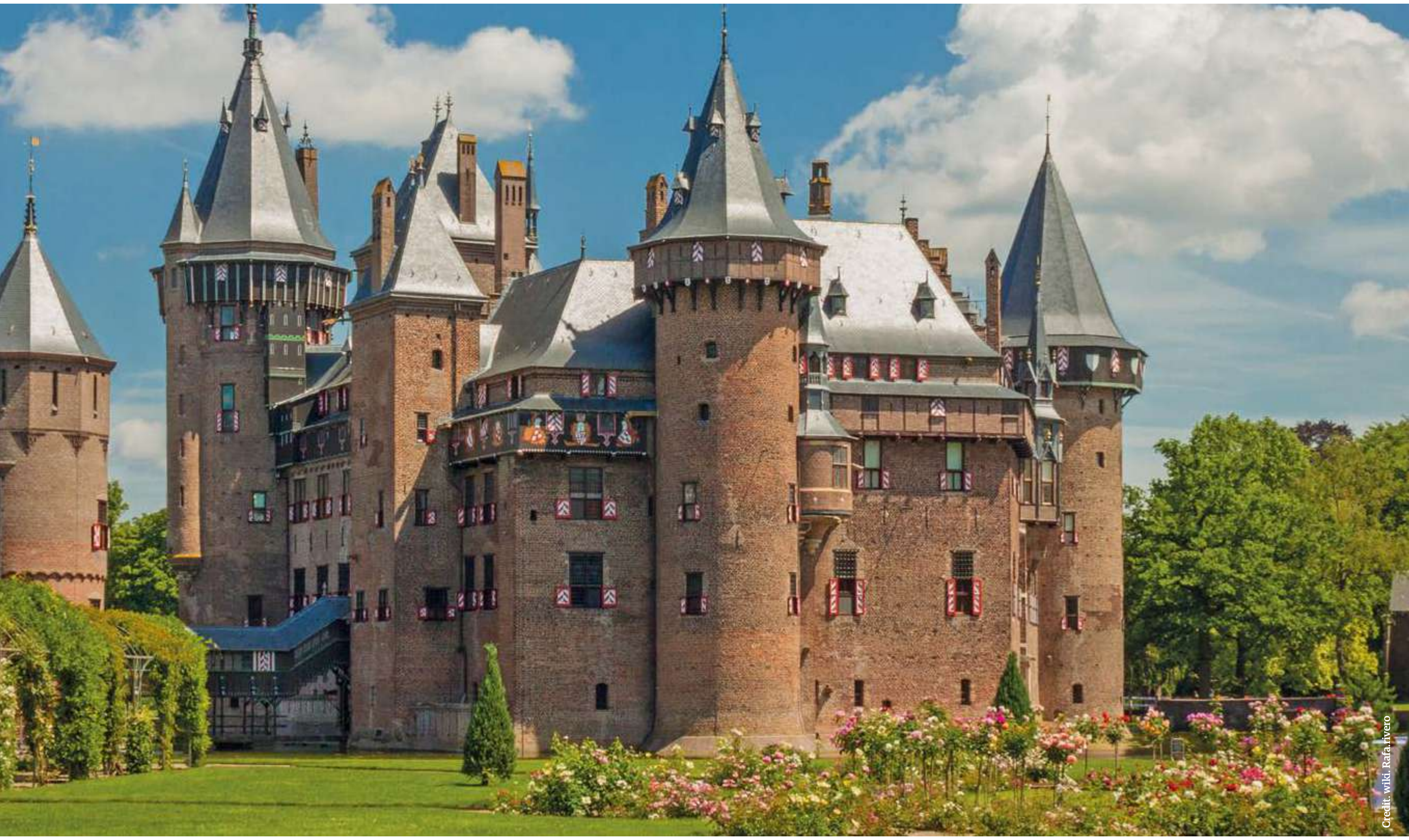
UTRECHT
NETHERLANDS



ENTRY FEE
ADULTS €17; CHILDREN €11

OPENING HOURS
9AM–5PM ALMOST EVERY DAY –
CHECK WEBSITE FOR EXCEPTIONS

WEBSITE
WWW.KASTEELDEHAAR.NL/ENGLISH



Credit. wiki. Rafa.rivero

KASTEEL DE HAAR

In the centre of the Netherlands, surrounded by over 135 acres of sprawling land is Kasteel de Haar, a fairy-tale fortress with towers, a moat and even a drawbridge. Originally built in the 13th century, it fell into disrepair and was restored from 1892 to 1912 with designs by Pierre Cuypers, who also lent his talents to the Rijksmuseum and Centraal station in Amsterdam. Today Kasteel de Haar is enjoyed by all, and both the castle and expansive gardens are open to the public.

FREDERIKSBORG CASTLE

ONE OF SCANDINAVIA'S MOST BEAUTIFUL BUILDINGS SITS POISED AMID A SHIMMERING LAKE AND STUNNING GARDENS

HILLERØD
DENMARK

NUMBER

08

WORDS BY ◆ ROSS HAMILTON

Looking westward, the copper towers and grand façade of Frederiksborg Slot seem to float on the calm waters of its surrounding lake. Built on three islets, the 'Nordic Versailles' is a monument to the Danish crown – the largest Renaissance palace in Scandinavia and a throwback to an era of absolutism that has long since passed.

Frederiksborg marked one of the first Danish castles to be built inland, a luxurious royal residence designed for recreation rather than coastal defence. Situated close to the rural town of Hillerød, the stunning location has played host to stately homes since the Medieval era, but the current castle is a testament to the vision of one of Denmark's most ambitious monarchs, as well as the generosity of its most notable brewer.

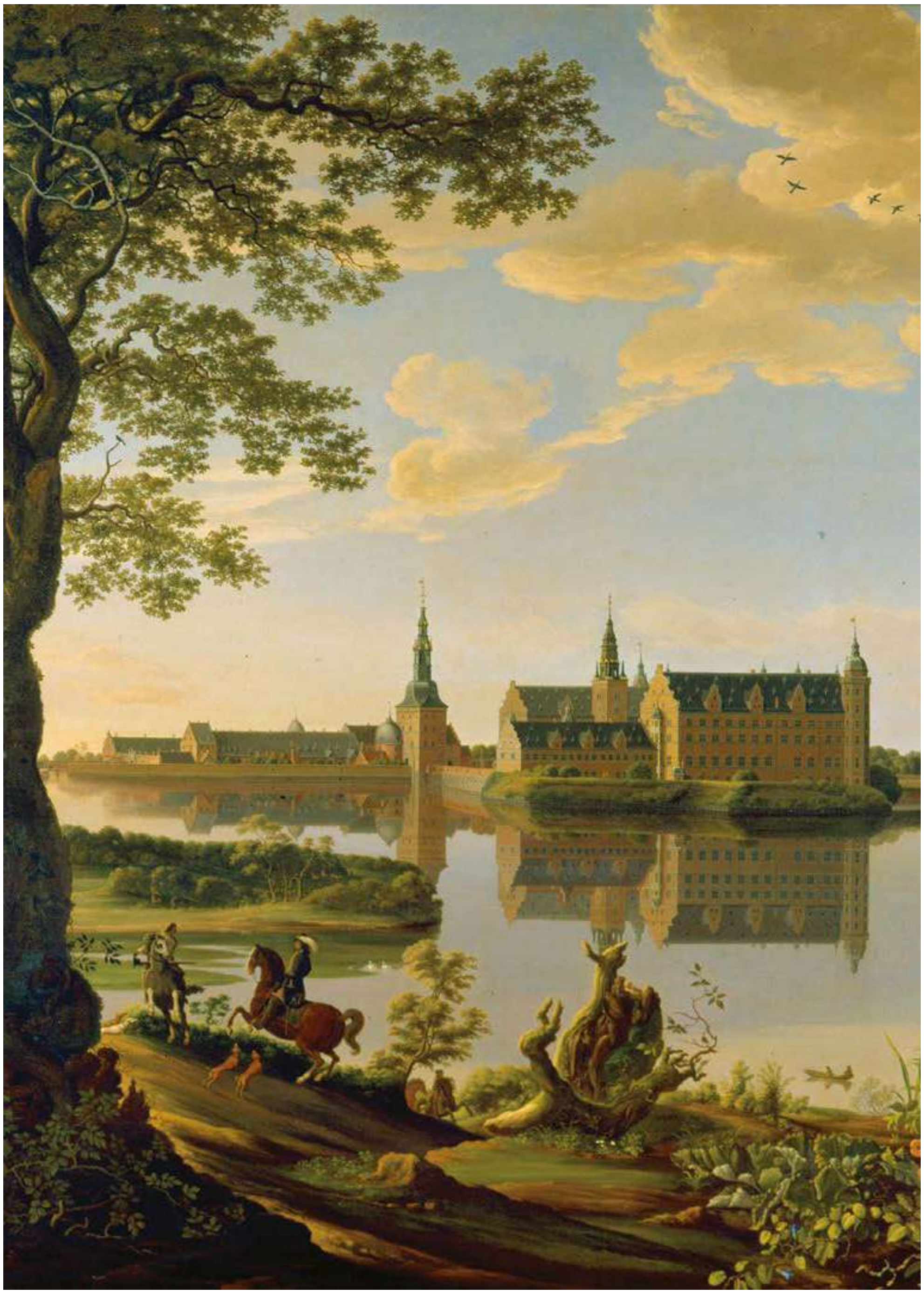
Christian IV, the Danish 'builder king' whose other notable projects include Rosenborg Castle and Copenhagen's famous Rundetaarn, was born at Frederiksborg in 1577. A prolific commissioner of architecture, he ordered his childhood home to be rebuilt at the turn of the 17th century, with the result being the captivating structure that exists today.

While much of the castle remains as it was upon its completion, a significant portion was left in ruin following a fire in 1859. Aghast at seeing a source of national pride in such a state, the Danish public and several prominent figures stepped forward to fund a restoration. Foremost was the influential JC Jacobsen, whose Carlsberg brewery remains a national institution. With Jacobsen's financial support, Frederiksborg was painstakingly restored to its former glory, down to finest details of its interiors. Fittingly, given the public's role in bringing the castle back from the brink, it's now open year round as the country's Museum of National History.

ENTRY FEE
ADULTS 75 DKK; CHILDREN 20 DKK; CONCESSIONS 60 DKK

OPENING HOURS
APRIL – OCTOBER 10AM–5PM; NOVEMBER – MARCH 11AM–3PM

WEBSITE
WWW.DNM.DK



A painting of Frederiksborg Castle with Frederick III on horseback by Lazarus Baratta

The bronze figures were cast in Prague, where de Vries was working at the time

A SYMBOLIC FOUNTAIN

THE NEPTUNE FOUNTAIN STANDS PROUDLY AS THE CENTREPIECE OF FREDERIKSBORG

The Neptune fountain was commissioned from master sculptor Adriaen de Vries by Christian IV. The Dutch artist cast a regal Neptune to stand atop the fountain, which was positioned in the central courtyard as a focal point to emphasise the primacy of the king and the Danish kingdom as a whole. This grandiose symbol of Denmark's power lasted only until 1659, when it became a victim of the Second Northern War with Sweden. Following the Treaty of Roskilde, the Neptune fountain was dismantled and shipped off to Sweden as spoils of war. It would be reassembled shortly after at its new home in the park at Drottningholm Palace, near Stockholm. The Neptune fountain that visitors to Frederiksborg see today is a faithful recreation of the original, completed by Danish artist Heinrich Hansen in 1888.

TWIN TOWERS

THE SOUTHERN ISLAND HEARKENS BACK TO THE CASTLE'S ORIGINS

Though less spectacular than Christian IV's reconstruction, the twin round towers on the southern islet are a prominent reminder of Frederik II's pioneering work. With the existing manor not deemed large enough for a royal residence, he extended the property before moving in, with the towers among the most notable.

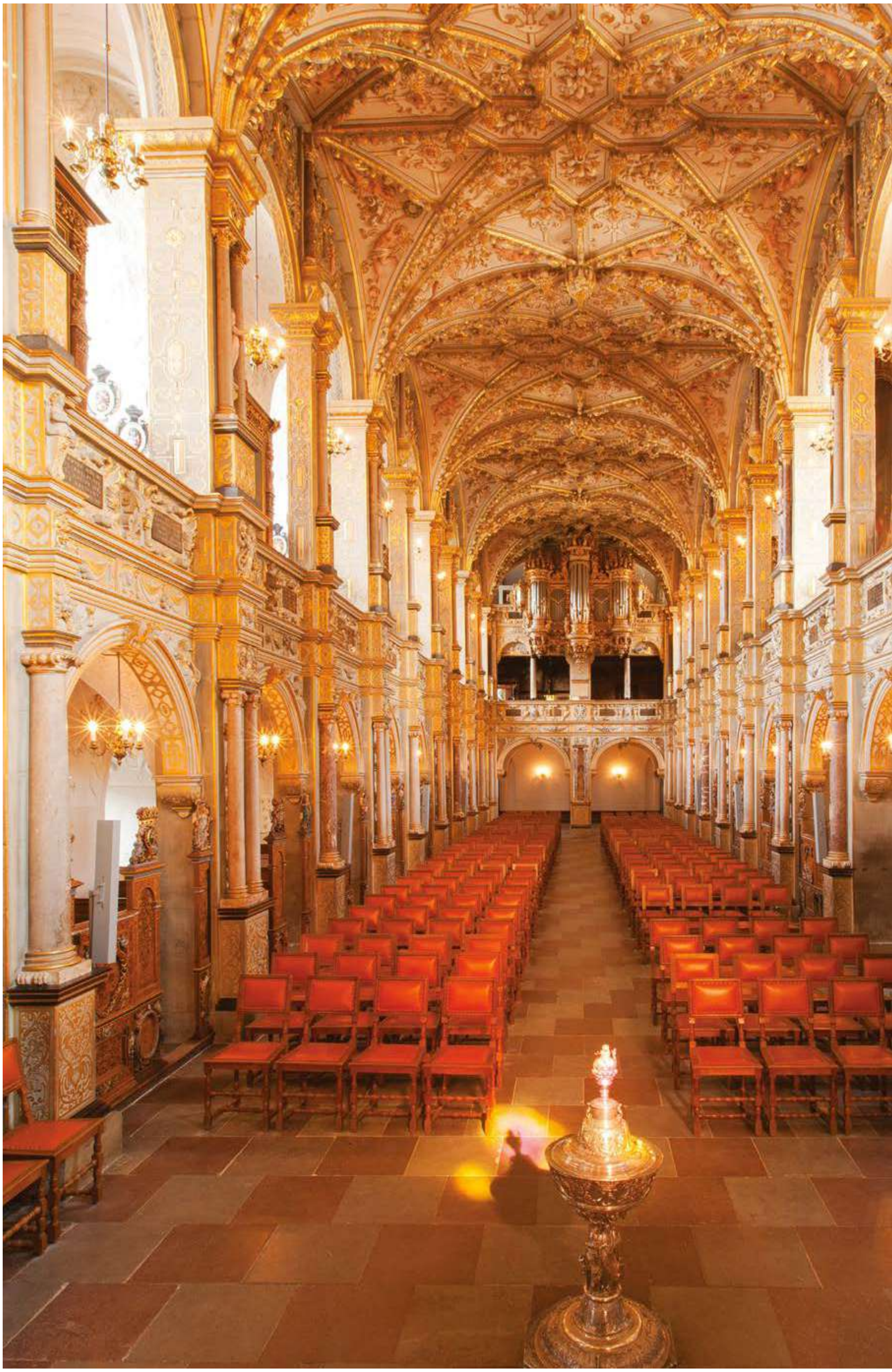
Flanking the bridge across to the main courtyard, the structures date from 1562 and feature tapered domes atop brick walls. The eastern and western buildings originally housed the castle's sheriff and scribe, and they each bear the mark of their maker. Spelt in coloured wall tiles with the date, Frederik's motto can still be read: "Mein Hoffnung zu Gott allein" ("My hope in God alone").

TWO GARDENS, TWO STYLES

DIFFERING PHILOSOPHIES GUIDED THE CONSTRUCTION OF FREDERIKSBORG'S

While Frederiksborg Castle's Renaissance architecture has remained intact since the early 17th century, the landscape surrounding it has been shaped and reshaped by generations of monarchs since. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Frederiksborg's two main gardens. The Baroque Garden, which dates from 1720-25, reflects the refined and regimented approach of many great 18th-century gardens. Designed by landscaper Johan Cornelius Krieger, its topiary, flowerbeds and grand waterway are meant to represent man's mastery of nature, and symmetry is valued above all else.

More than a century later the Baroque style had fallen out of fashion somewhat in the world of landscape gardening, but rather than convert the existing garden, Frederiksborg received a brand new one in the Romantic style. Laid out by Frederik VII, the later garden is more expressive, filled with winding pathways, canals and ponds, and features a small lodge in the style of a Norwegian manor.



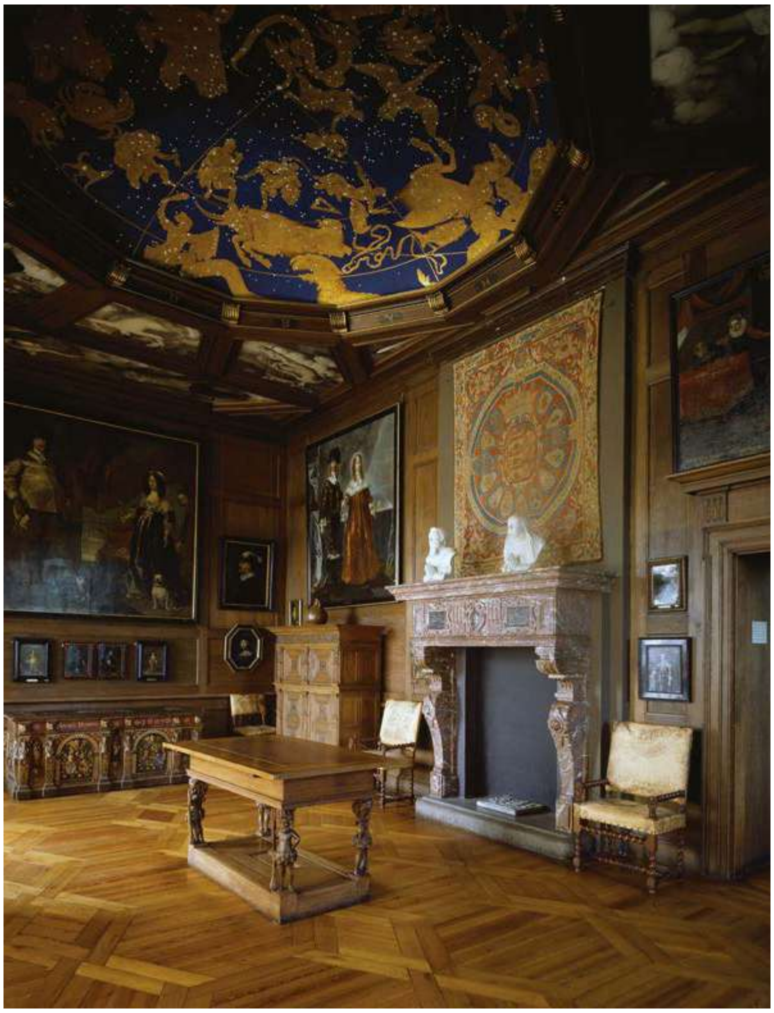
THE CASTLE CHAPEL

The crowning achievement of Frederiksborg in a literal sense, the castle's chapel is a masterpiece. Extending fully along the west wing of the castle, it escaped significant damage in the 1859 fire and has served a crucial role in the history of the Danish monarchy.

While it was used sparingly as a royal residence after the close of the 17th century, with the numerous palaces situated in Copenhagen proving more popular, the chapel retained importance as the venue for the coronations and anointments of Denmark's absolute monarchs until the middle of the 19th century. The 1665 Kongeloven (King's Law) enshrined absolutism in a written constitution, and Christian V became the first monarch to be anointed at the chapel in an appropriately lavish ceremony five years later.

Beneath its vaulted stucco ceilings and ornate, gilded pillars lies a magnificent altarpiece, crafted by jeweller Jacob Mores from gold, silver and ebony. Around the walls lie the coat of arms of members of Denmark's two highest Orders – the Elephant and the Dannebrog. Though mostly reserved for Danish nobility, you'll also find notable figures including Winston Churchill, Dwight D Eisenhower and Nelson Mandela among their number.

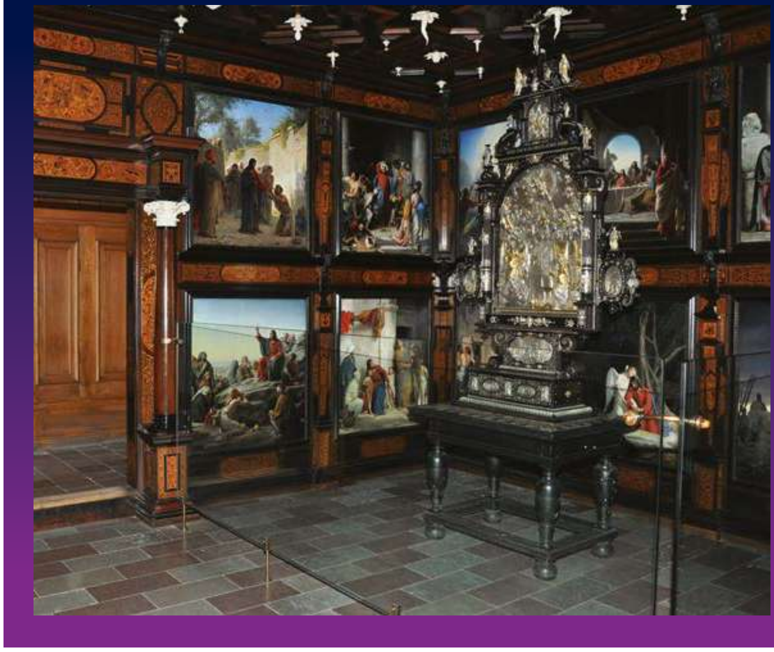
The chapel's defining feature is the Compenius organ, which owes its name to Flemish master Isaiah Compenius. Dating from 1610, the organ is the oldest in Denmark and boasts 1,001 wooden pipes, richly decorated and celebrating the organ as a piece of sculpture as much as a musical instrument. It is still used during the chapel's weekly concerts.



ZODIAC ROOM

Christian IV turned to Flemish architect Hans van Steenwinckel the Elder to transform Frederiksborg. However, van Steenwinckel's work barely progressed beyond the planning stages before he died, and his sons – Lorenz and Hans the Younger – were charged with following through with his designs.

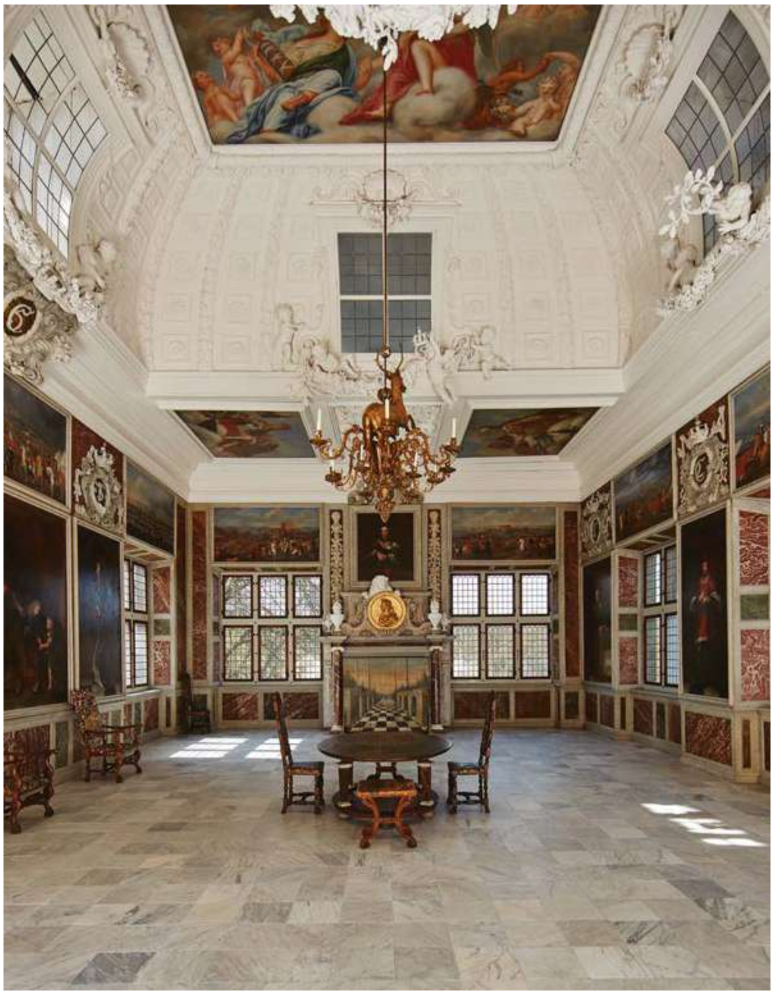
Their work lived up to their father's legacy, with the Zodiac Room just one of many that bears their distinctive Dutch Renaissance style. While its wood-panelled walls and marble fireplace create an intimate ambience, the room's ceiling dome sets it apart. In vivid hues of gold and blue, and studded with glistening stars, it allowed those present to survey the heavens from the comfort of their Earthly quarters.



THE KING'S ORATORY

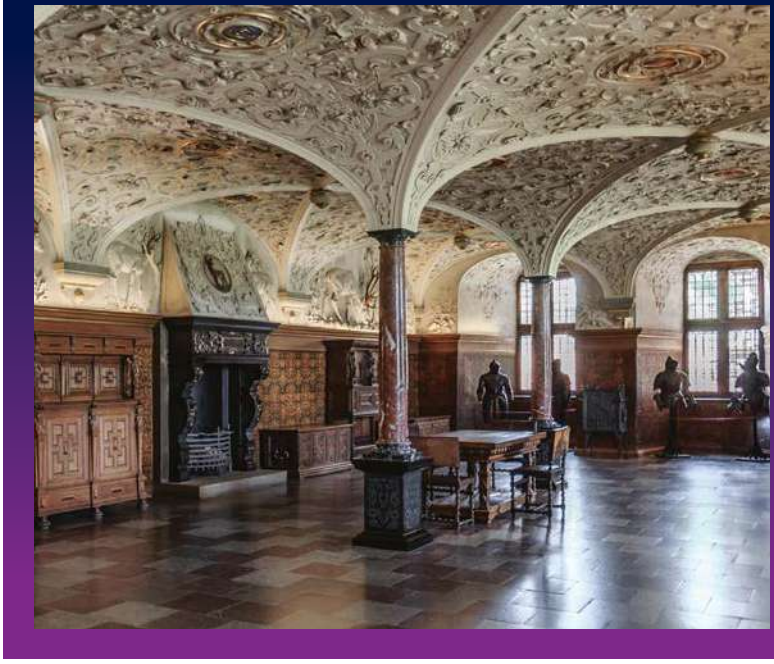
The chapel's upper gallery, which runs along the length of the structure, offers visitors access to one of the castle's most hallowed rooms. The King's Oratory, also known as the Royal Prayer Chamber, was a sanctuary for the monarch to worship privately.

The best example here is the altar – while most of the oratory was devastated by fire, the stunning work of German artist Matthäus Wallbaum survived. The goldsmith's intricate opus, which features a gorgeously realised angelic chorus wrought from silver, is accompanied today by some of the castle's finest art; Danish painter Carl Bloch's 23-work series on the life of Jesus, created between 1865 and 1879, adorns the walls in its entirety.



THE AUDIENCE CHAMBER

Reopened after four years of renovations, the Audience Chamber is one of the most lavishly decorated rooms in the castle. Built during the 1680s for Christian V, the room combines Renaissance and Baroque elements and features some stunning paintings and stucco work around its domed ceiling. Connected to the Tower Room in the corner of Valdemar Hall, the chamber provided noblemen and commoners alike with the opportunity to speak directly to the king. Seated in an elevated chair opposite the entrance and flanked by portraits of his ancestors, the setting was fitting of a man who had become the first absolute Danish monarch. Additionally, the room features a number of works by Jacques d'Agar, court painter to Christian V.

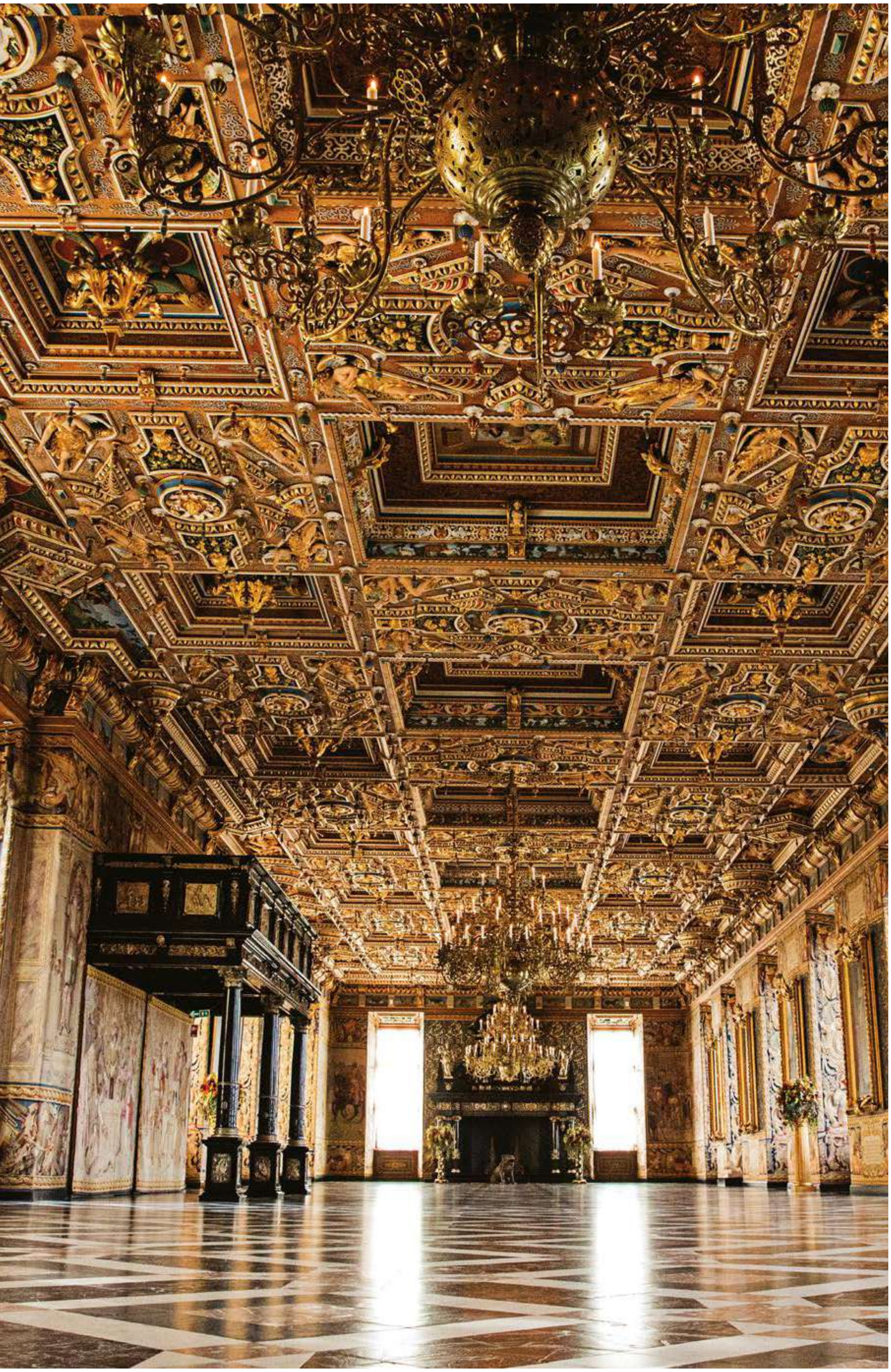


THE ROSE ROOM

Aptly named, the Rose Room is a hall in which the air seems to shimmer with a subtle pink tint. Occupying the ground floor of the king's wing, it presents a notable foil to the far more extravagant décor of the Great Hall. This is in keeping with its original purpose: the Rose Room was where the king and his knights would dine together in a more low-key, but opulent setting.

The Rose Room immediately draws eyes upwards towards its stunningly decorated ceiling. A series of vaulted arches seem to sprout from the deep red trunks of their supported pillars, and they feature magnificent stuccowork depicting flowers and bountiful fruits. Along the walls, the vividly rendered deer friezes that overlook the cavernous interior are embedded with real antlers.

© Alamy; Getty Images; Shutterstock



The ornate guilded ceiling of the Great Hall was restored in the 19th century after being almost completely destroyed by a fire

THE GREAT HALL

Frederiksborg was built with luxury in mind – as a place for entertaining guests but also humbling them – and the castle's magnificent Great Hall is the room that best encapsulates the awesome quality that Christian IV had envisioned. Extending an incredible 55 metres along the west wing of the palace, the 'Riddersalen' was a prime location for the decadent banquets and splendorous royal functions that earned Frederiksborg its reputation as the Scandinavian Versailles.

Walk in and you'll find there's not an inch of wall or ceiling that isn't covered in gilded embellishments and beautiful patterns. The richly woven tapestries that chart the life and deeds of Christian IV were the work of Flemish artist Karel van Mander, and the ceiling creates a dazzling illusion of depth through its gargantuan chandeliers and vivid painted recesses.

The hall's current state is all the more remarkable as it was one of the rooms worst affected by the damaging 1859 fire. During a December evening King Frederik VII retired to the room in which he kept his collection of prehistoric artefacts. A famous antique enthusiast, he would frequently spend hours poring over assorted items from Denmark's past, and with the temperature well below freezing the King requested that a fire be lit. Hours later the castle was ablaze. Mander's tapestries were lost, and the carved wooden ceiling suffered significant damage.

Enter architect Ferdinand Meldahl, whose restoration effort was completely successful in recapturing the Great Hall's former glory – a feat made possible thanks to the discovery and use of Mander's centuries-old original sketches for the room.

NUMBER

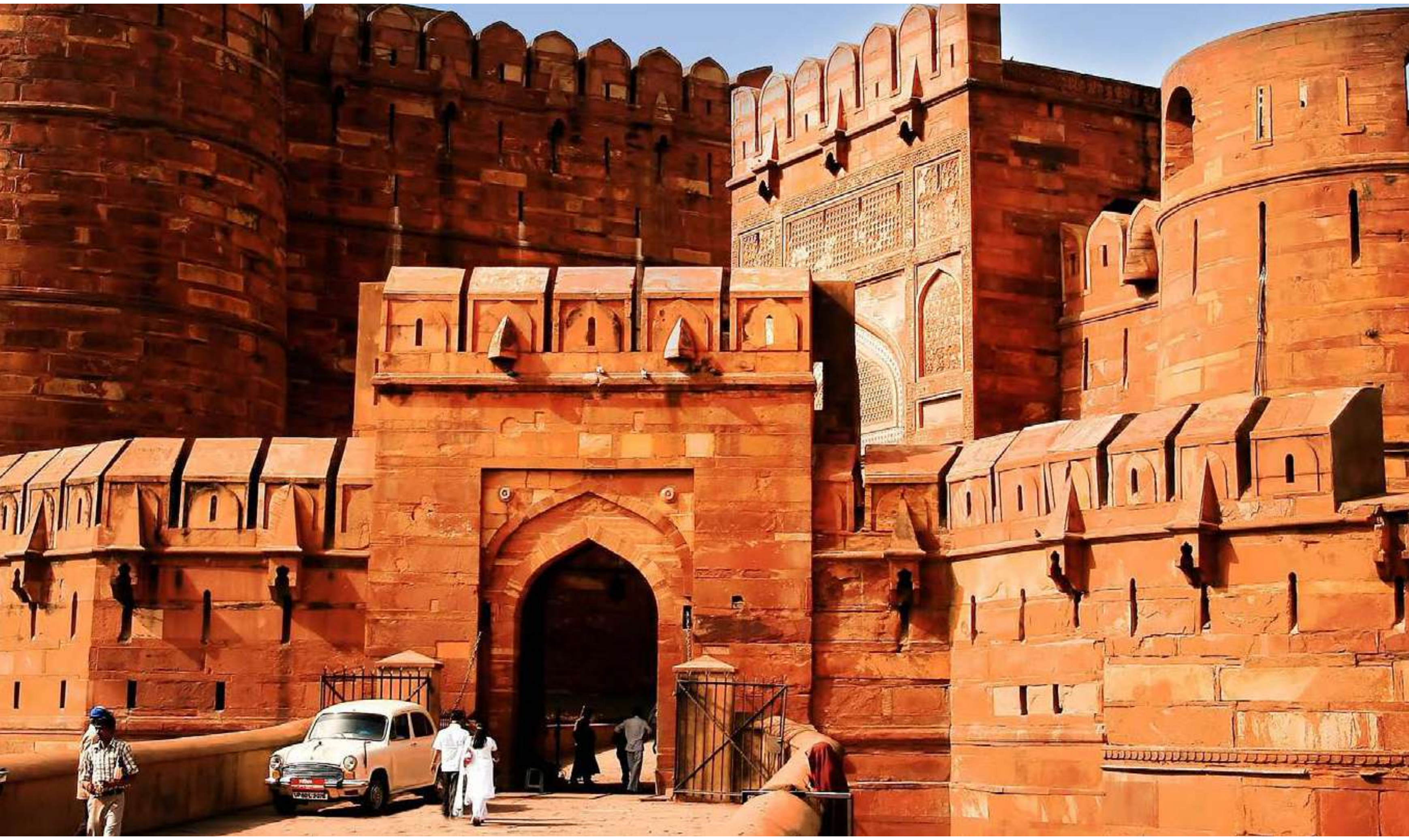
09

AGRA
INDIA

ENTRY FEE
INDIANS ₹40; FOREIGNERS ₹550

OPENING HOURS
TUESDAY – SUNDAY SUNRISE TO SUNSET

WEBSITE
WWW.AGRAFORT.GOV.IN



AGRA FORT

After 4,000 workers toiled for eight years, Agra Fort was finally finished. A home to Mughal emperors for just under 100 years, a trip here can show you the rich history of the Mughal Empire's old capital as you walk through this monumental complex of red sandstone and white marble. Surrounded by walls 70 feet high, the fort is as imposing as it is beautiful, and just 2.5 kilometres from the Taj Mahal, this UNESCO World Heritage site is waiting to be uncovered.

JAPAN'S BEST CASTLES

SURVIVING WARS, NATURAL DISASTERS AND GOVERNMENT REFORMS, THESE SEVEN CASTLES REPRESENT THE BEST JAPAN HAS TO OFFER

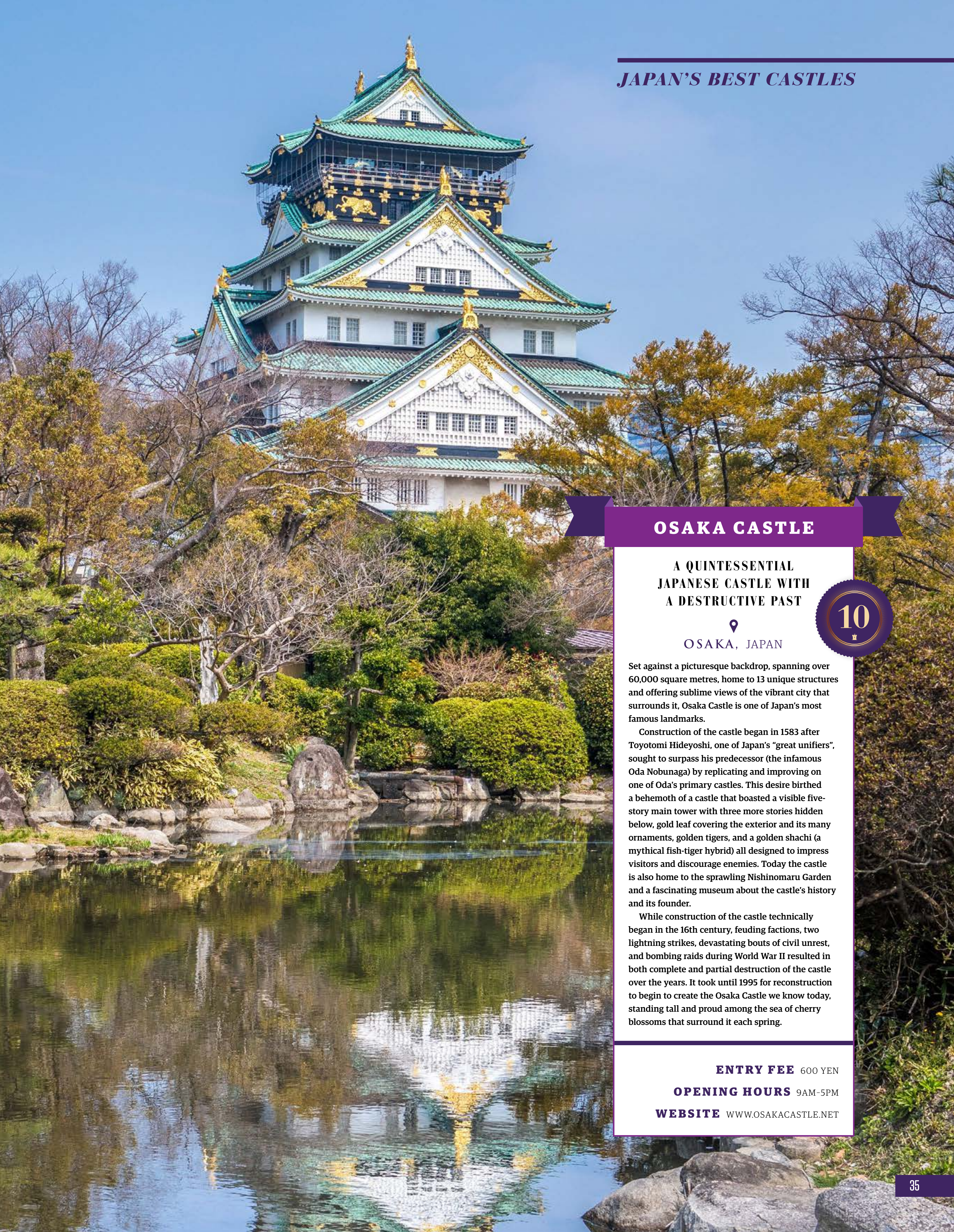
While towering European structures might be the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word 'castle', Japan has its own rich history of castles that is often overlooked.

Before Japan was unified at the turn of the 17th century, the country was made up of small independent states that were constantly at war with one another. To defend themselves against their numerous enemies, fortified strongholds sprang up across the land. These castles were located in strategic places that allowed for the natural landscape to factor in as part of their defences. Just like their European counterparts, Japanese castles often featured moats and impenetrable stone walls, but were also constructed of wood, meaning they were prone to being destroyed by fire. As they were designed to house the lords and samurai, Japanese castles were often large with ostentatious exteriors and complex interiors aimed to display their strength and wealth while simultaneously intimidating and confusing incoming enemies.

Over the years, due to wars, earthquakes, lightning strikes and government reforms, many of the castles have fallen, been rebuilt, and fallen again. But today, many still stand. Some, like the ever-enduring Himeji Castle, exist in their original form, and others, such as the stunning Osaka Castle, stand as an impressively accurate reconstruction. These castles offer visitors the chance to bask in the rich history of a pre-unified Japan while also enjoying the stunning scenery that surrounds them.

WORDS BY ◆ SAFFRON ALEXANDER & JESSICA LEGGETT

Despite being destroyed at several points over the years, Osaka Castle still stands



OSAKA CASTLE

A QUINTESSENTIAL JAPANESE CASTLE WITH A DESTRUCTIVE PAST

10

OSAKA, JAPAN

Set against a picturesque backdrop, spanning over 60,000 square metres, home to 13 unique structures and offering sublime views of the vibrant city that surrounds it, Osaka Castle is one of Japan's most famous landmarks.

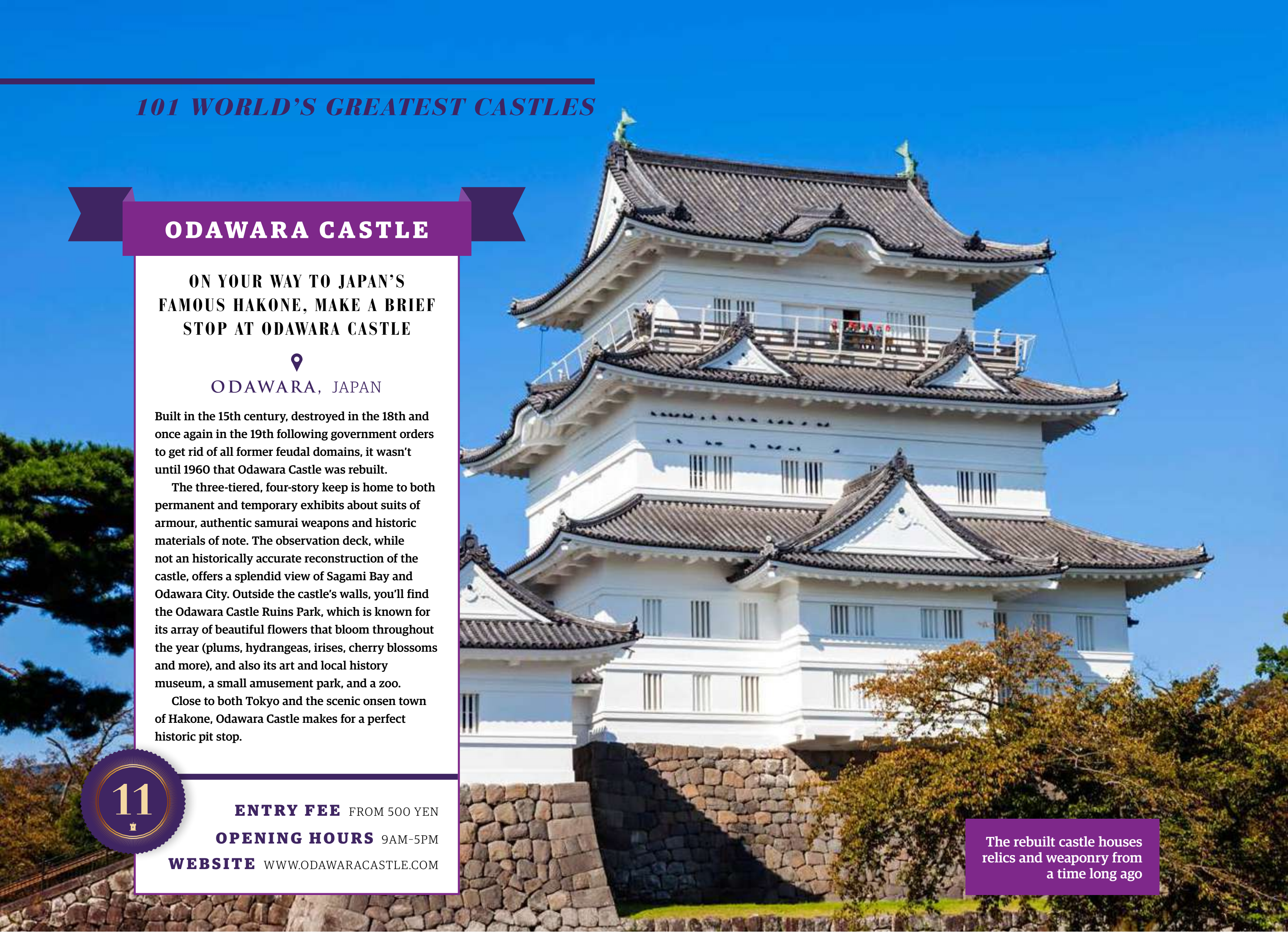
Construction of the castle began in 1583 after Toyotomi Hideyoshi, one of Japan's "great unifiers", sought to surpass his predecessor (the infamous Oda Nobunaga) by replicating and improving on one of Oda's primary castles. This desire birthed a behemoth of a castle that boasted a visible five-story main tower with three more stories hidden below, gold leaf covering the exterior and its many ornaments, golden tigers, and a golden shachi (a mythical fish-tiger hybrid) all designed to impress visitors and discourage enemies. Today the castle is also home to the sprawling Nishinomaru Garden and a fascinating museum about the castle's history and its founder.

While construction of the castle technically began in the 16th century, feuding factions, two lightning strikes, devastating bouts of civil unrest, and bombing raids during World War II resulted in both complete and partial destruction of the castle over the years. It took until 1995 for reconstruction to begin to create the Osaka Castle we know today, standing tall and proud among the sea of cherry blossoms that surround it each spring.

ENTRY FEE 600 YEN

OPENING HOURS 9AM–5PM

WEBSITE WWW.OSAKACASTLE.NET



11

ODAWARA CASTLE

ON YOUR WAY TO JAPAN'S FAMOUS HAKONE, MAKE A BRIEF STOP AT ODAWARA CASTLE

ODAWARA, JAPAN

Built in the 15th century, destroyed in the 18th and once again in the 19th following government orders to get rid of all former feudal domains, it wasn't until 1960 that Odawara Castle was rebuilt.

The three-tiered, four-story keep is home to both permanent and temporary exhibits about suits of armour, authentic samurai weapons and historic materials of note. The observation deck, while not an historically accurate reconstruction of the castle, offers a splendid view of Sagami Bay and Odawara City. Outside the castle's walls, you'll find the Odawara Castle Ruins Park, which is known for its array of beautiful flowers that bloom throughout the year (plums, hydrangeas, irises, cherry blossoms and more), and also its art and local history museum, a small amusement park, and a zoo.

Close to both Tokyo and the scenic onsen town of Hakone, Odawara Castle makes for a perfect historic pit stop.

ENTRY FEE FROM 500 YEN

OPENING HOURS 9AM-5PM

WEBSITE WWW.ODAWARACASTLE.COM

The rebuilt castle houses relics and weaponry from a time long ago

HIMEJI CASTLE

PAY A VISIT TO ONE OF JAPAN'S MOST ENDURING AND ELEGANT CASTLES

12

HIMEJI, JAPAN

ENTRY FEE
1,000 YEN

OPENING HOURS
9AM-5PM

WEBSITE
WWW.HIMEJICASTLE.JP/EN

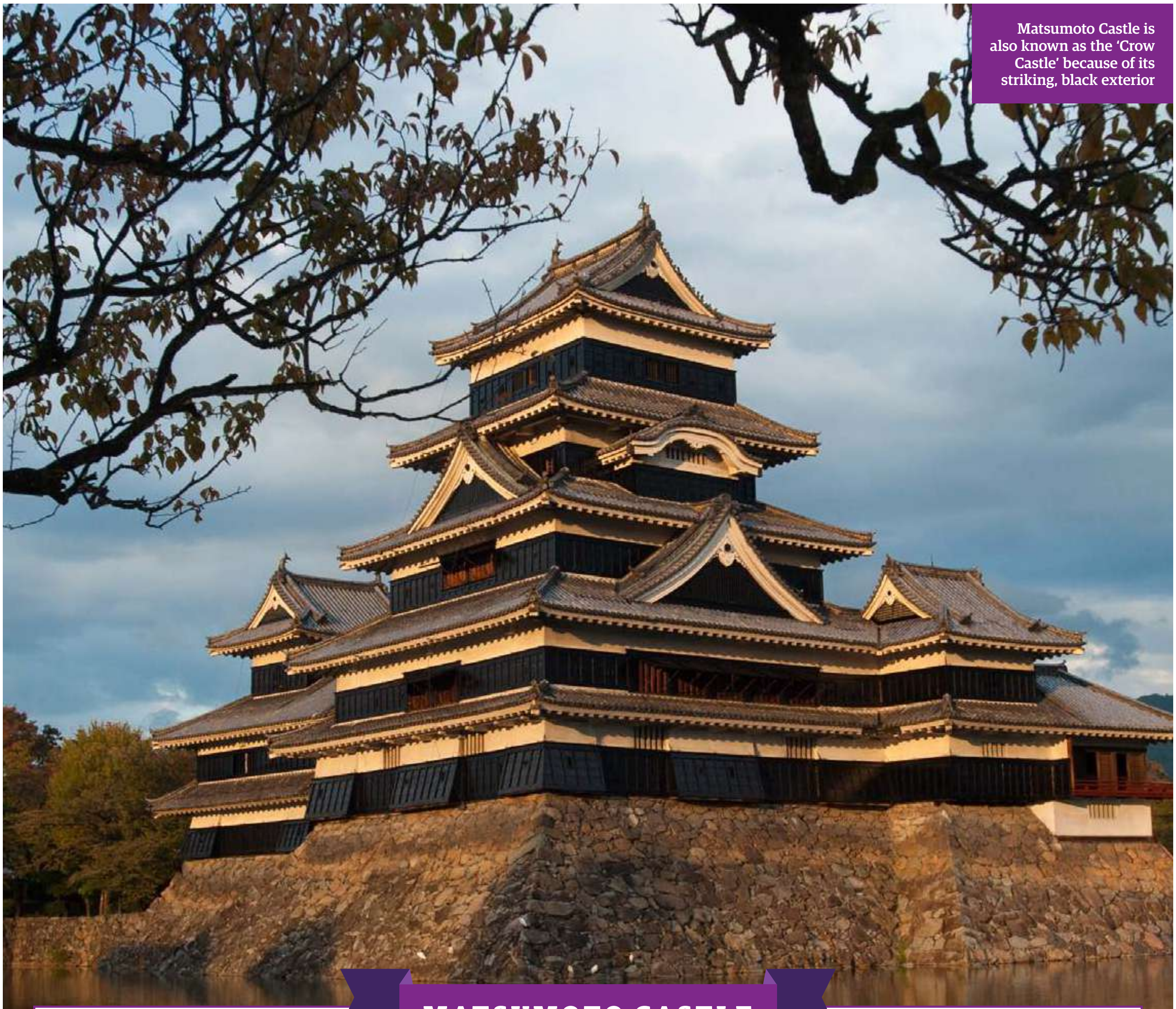
Himeji remains one of Japan's oldest and most breathtaking castles

Japanese castles are stunning architectural achievements, none more so than Himeji Castle. Often referred to as the White Heron Castle because of its graceful, white exterior, Himeji sits atop of Himeyama hill, always watching over the city below.

The castle was completed in the early 1600s by Ikeda Terumasa (who received the castle from Tokugawa Ieyasu as a gift for his help in the Battle of Sekigahara). It is comprised of a complex network of over 80 buildings specifically designed to keep enemies at bay and leave them vulnerable to attacks. Visitors to the castle can make their way through the maze-like grounds until they reach the main keep - a six-story structure with rare and unique wing buildings. The keep itself is home to a small shrine on its top floor and provides an excellent viewing spot of the grounds below and across Himeji city.

The castle, which was recently renovated, is one of only 12 fortresses in Japan to avoid complete destruction over the years and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site because of its masterful construction and beauty.

After you finish admiring the craftsmanship of the castle and learning about its rich history from the exhibits, take time to stroll through the grounds where the hundreds of cherry trees bloom in the spring, or wander through the attached Koko-en Garden - a traditional Japanese garden created to commemorate Himeji's 100th anniversary.



Matsumoto Castle is also known as the 'Crow Castle' because of its striking, black exterior

MATSUMOTO CASTLE

13

MATSUMOTO CASTLE OFFERS AN AUTHENTIC 16TH-CENTURY CASTLE EXPERIENCE

MATSUMOTO, JAPAN

Just a few hours outside of Tokyo you'll find one of Japan's most historic structures: Matsumoto Castle. Built in the late 1500s, the castle still bears its original wooden interior and exterior stoning, providing a rare perspective into castle life in the 16th century.

Unlike many of its contemporaries, Matsumoto Castle is a hirajiro – a castle built on flat ground as opposed to on top of a hill or mountain. These types of castles were difficult to defend and, considering the castle was built during Japan's Sengoku period (a time of great unrest), its location may seem like a poor choice. However, the castle was designed and fortified for long-distance warfare. The main keep (Dai-tenshu), the smaller keep (Inui Kotenshu), and the Watari Tower were built with openings for marksmen and archers to shoot and for soldiers to drop stones onto incoming enemies.

The castle also includes an observation deck offering unrivalled views of the Japanese mountains and Matsumoto City itself, a moat that is home to koi fish and swans, a historical gun museum, and even a tsukimi-yagura (moon viewing tower). Avoid the cherry blossom crowds that will flock to the castle every spring, and visit in the autumn to take part in the annual Harvest Moon viewing festival where it's said you'll be able to see the moon three times; in the sky, reflected in the clear water of the moat surrounding you, and once more in your cup of sake.

ENTRY FEE 610 YEN

OPENING HOURS 8.30AM-5PM

WEBSITE WWW.MATSUMOTO-CASTLE.JP

TAKEDA CASTLE

HEAD TO TAKEDA CASTLE AND MARVEL AT JAPAN'S ETHEREAL CASTLE IN THE SKY

14

ASAGO, JAPAN

There are few sights in the Japan as unique and as breathtaking as Takeda Castle.

The castle was built in 1441 but abandoned after the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600, when its lord, Akamatsu Hirohide, was accused of arson and subsequently committed seppuku (Japanese ritual suicide reserved for samurai). After the death of its final lord, the castle was abandoned and left to fall into disrepair. While no buildings remain on the grounds, the ruins offer an impressive and uninhibited view of the castle's layout and the mountains that surround it.

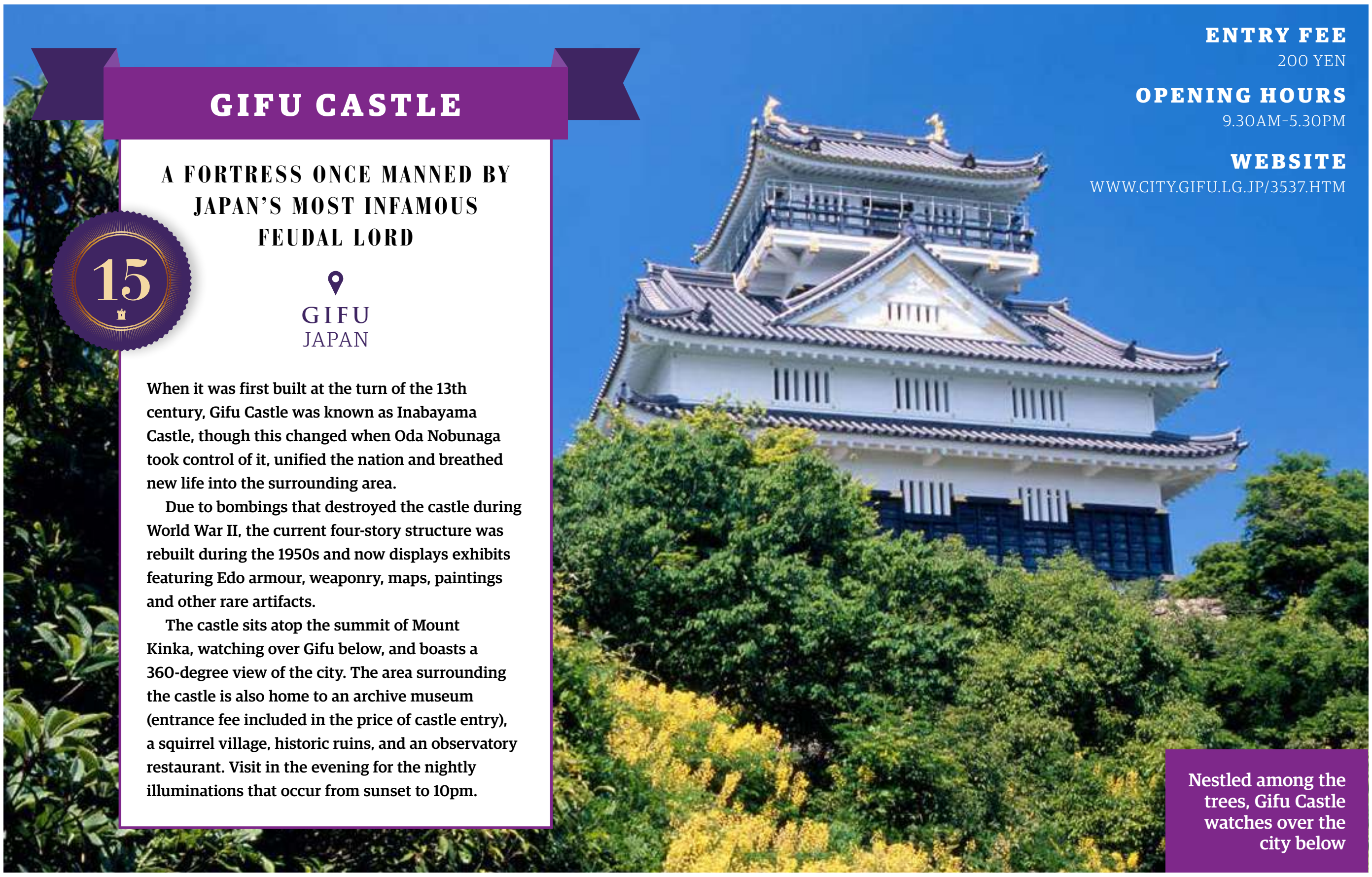
At over 300 metres above sea level, Takeda Castle earned itself the moniker 'the floating castle in the sky' thanks to the clouds that surround it, giving the illusion of an almost otherworldly floating castle. Head to the Ritsuunkyo viewing spot on the slope opposite the castle before sunrise during the autumn and winter and watch as the ghostly ruins of the castle appear on the horizon.

ENTRY FEE
500 YEN

OPENING HOURS
VARIES DEPENDING ON SEASON

WEBSITE
WWW.CITY.ASAGO.HYOGO.JP/TAKEDA

An abandoned castle floating in the sky



GIFU CASTLE

A FORTRESS ONCE MANNED BY JAPAN'S MOST INFAMOUS FEUDAL LORD

15

GIFU
JAPAN

When it was first built at the turn of the 13th century, Gifu Castle was known as Inabayama Castle, though this changed when Oda Nobunaga took control of it, unified the nation and breathed new life into the surrounding area.

Due to bombings that destroyed the castle during World War II, the current four-story structure was rebuilt during the 1950s and now displays exhibits featuring Edo armour, weaponry, maps, paintings and other rare artifacts.

The castle sits atop the summit of Mount Kinka, watching over Gifu below, and boasts a 360-degree view of the city. The area surrounding the castle is also home to an archive museum (entrance fee included in the price of castle entry), a squirrel village, historic ruins, and an observatory restaurant. Visit in the evening for the nightly illuminations that occur from sunset to 10pm.

ENTRY FEE
200 YEN

OPENING HOURS
9.30AM-5.30PM

WEBSITE
WWW.CITY.GIFU.LG.JP/3537.HTM

Nestled among the trees, Gifu Castle watches over the city below

The ancient castle-style Fujimi-yagura guard tower building at Tokyo Imperial Palace

EDO CASTLE

16

VISIT THE HOME WHERE THE MIGHTY TOKUGAWA SHOGUNS ONCE LIVED IN JAPAN

TOKYO, JAPAN

Edo Castle is an absolute must-see for anyone who wants to immerse themselves in one of Japan's most significantly historic attractions. It was built over five centuries ago, in 1457, by samurai, poet and military strategist Ota Dokan. From 1590, the castle became the residence of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the founder of the Tokugawa shogunate.

Following the Battle of Sekigahara, the shogunate would rule Japan for just over 260 years from 1603 to 1868, a period that subsequently became known as the Edo period. During this time, Edo Castle effectively became the political and military capital of Japan, and Ieyasu began renovations that turned it into the largest castle in the country.

The castle was also the location for the events that sparked the revenge of the famous forty-seven ronin, after their master was forced to commit ritual suicide after assaulting a court official there, in an event also known as the Ako incident. After the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Emperor Meiji renamed Edo as Tokyo, and turned it into the official capital of Japan. He also resided at the castle for two decades before relocating to the newly built Imperial Palace.

Today, Edo Castle lies at the centre of Tokyo as part of the Tokyo Imperial Palace, where it can be found in the East Gardens. Unfortunately, the majority of Edo Castle was badly damaged in separate fires in 1657 and 1873, and it has never been rebuilt to its former glory.

However, the stone foundation of the former castle tower still exists, which, before the fire of 1657, was the tallest castle tower in Japanese history. Aside from the foundations, the castle's walls, moats, entrance gates and guardhouses still remain for visitors to see today, including the picturesque Fujimi Yagura, a watchtower dating back to the mid 17th century.

Granted, viewing the remains of a castle does not sound as breathtaking as seeing the beautiful Imperial Palace next door, but Edo Castle has a lot to offer – for example, climb to the top of the castle ruins if you want to get a panoramic view of the Imperial Gardens. The East Gardens are free to enter, and visitors can roam around and explore the grounds at their own pace without the restrictions of a guided tour.

Go early in the morning to guarantee spending a couple of hours surrounded by peace and tranquillity, away from the hustle and bustle of cosmopolitan Tokyo. Also located in the East Gardens is the Museum of the Imperial Collections, which opened in 1993 and holds more than 9,500 pieces of artwork belonging to the Imperial family. This is also free to enter.

There are three gates at Edo Castle that are open to the public: Ote-mon, Hirakawa-mon and Kitahanebaschi-mon. Ote-mon gate is considered to be the main entrance, with a short, five-minute walk from Otemachi Station, or a 15-minute walk from Tokyo Station. As for the other two gates, they are a short walk from Takebashi Station, so it is up to you which one to use, but whatever you do, do not miss out on seeing one of the capital's most scenic sites.

ENTRY FEE
FREE

OPENING HOURS
DAILY EXCEPT MONDAY & FRIDAY 9AM-4.30PM

WEBSITE
WWW.JAPAN.TRAVEL/EN/SPOT/1734

101 WORLD'S GREATEST CASTLES

EDINBURGH CASTLE

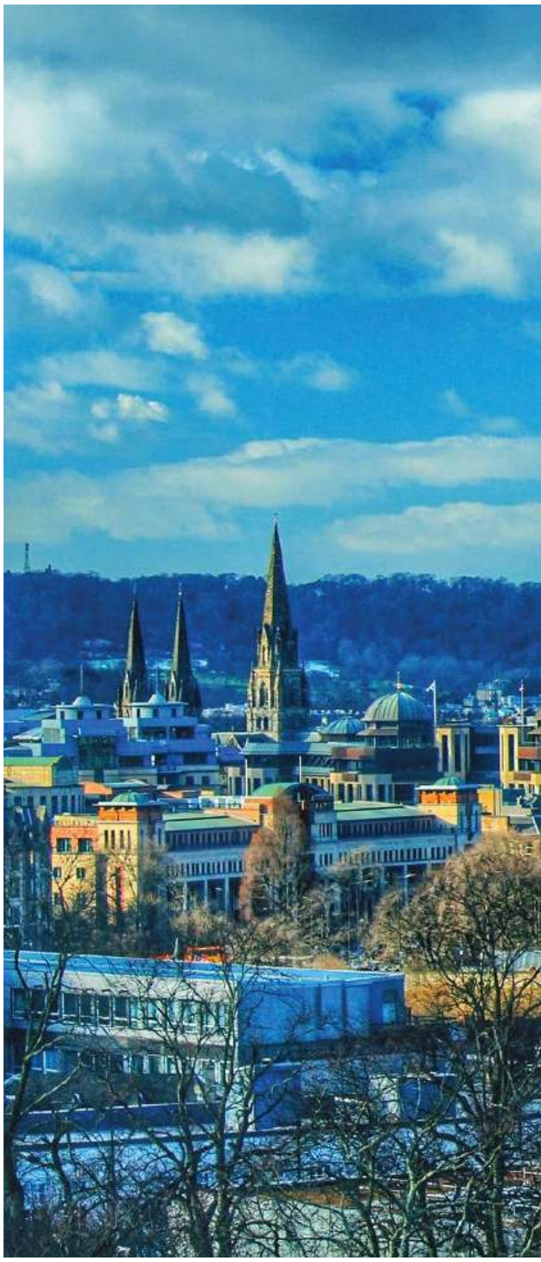
DURING THE REBELLION OF 1745, JACOBITE FORCES TOOK CONTROL OF EDINBURGH – BUT THE CITY'S ICONIC CASTLE WOULD NOT SURRENDER

EDINBURGH
SCOTLAND

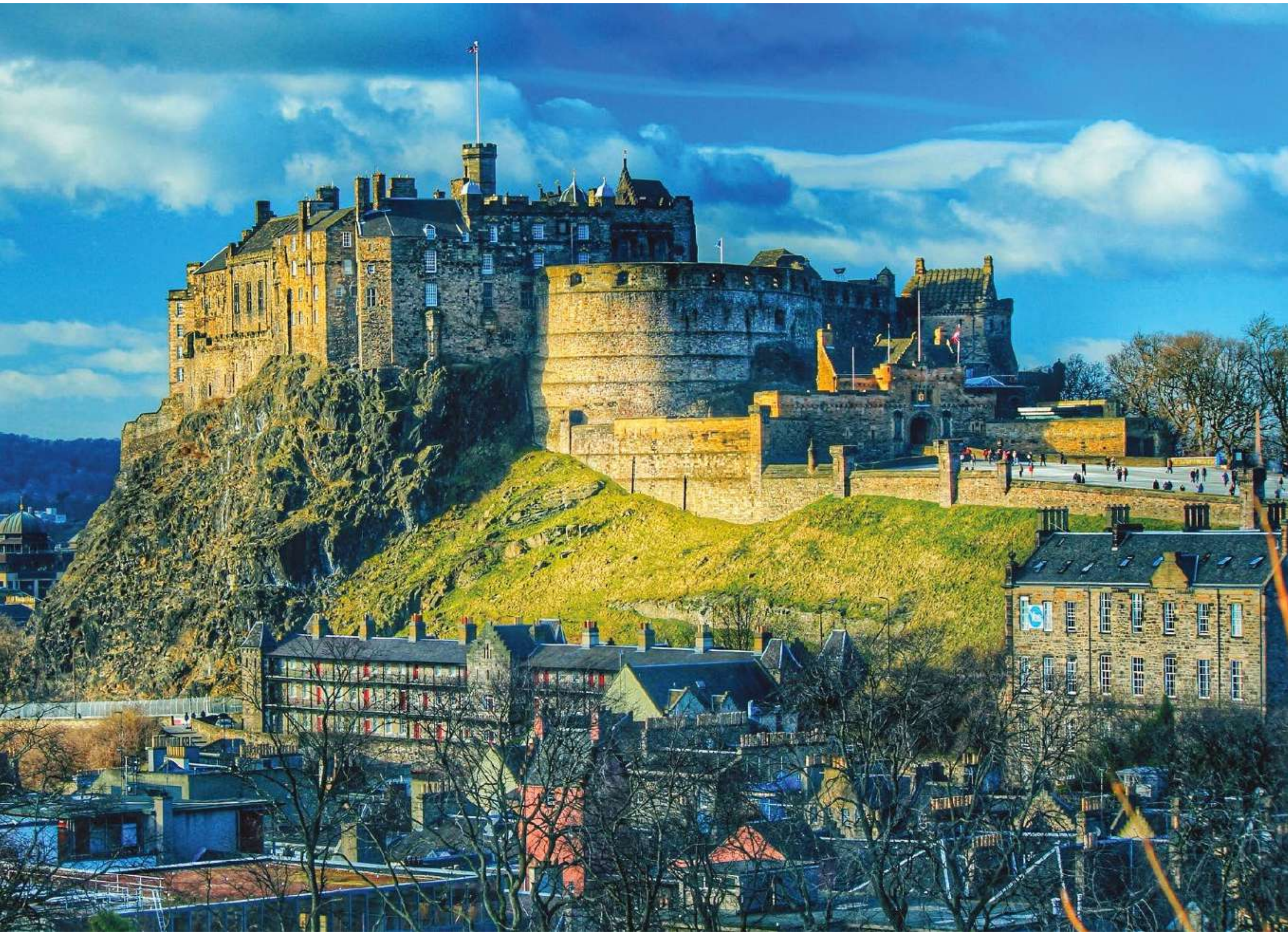
NUMBER

17

WORDS BY ◆ REBECCA FORD



On 15 September 1745, the sound of bells echoed throughout the city of Edinburgh. They clanged a warning: the Jacobite army of Charles Edward Stuart, 'Bonnie Prince Charlie', was on its way south. People rushed into the streets in panic, for the city, with the exception of the castle, was ill prepared for battle. Efforts were made to improve its defences and arms were handed out to enthusiastic volunteers. But when a letter from Prince Charles arrived the next day warning citizens that he was determined to enter the



city – and could not answer for the consequences if anyone opposed him – many urged capitulation. Rumours spread – one said that 16,000 Highlanders were going to take the city – and the volunteers lost their courage and marched swiftly back up the hill to the castle to hand back their weapons. In the early hours of the morning of 17 September, Charles – who was encamped nearby – sent a party to break into the city. It proved easier than expected; a gate at the Netherbow Port was opened by mistake, so the Jacobites rushed in and went on to seize the guardhouse in the High Street, followed by the guard posts on the walls. By midday, the sound of bagpipes filled the air and the Highlanders were in control of the Scottish capital. Well, most of it, as a flag of defiance still flew from the castle – and the commander inside refused to surrender.

Perched high on the tip of a volcano that became extinct some 70 million years ago, Edinburgh Castle is an enduring symbol both of the city and of Scotland itself. It has functioned as palace and prison, fortress and refuge, royal residence and republican garrison, and its strategic position –

ENTRY FEE

ADULTS £17.50; CHILDREN £10.50

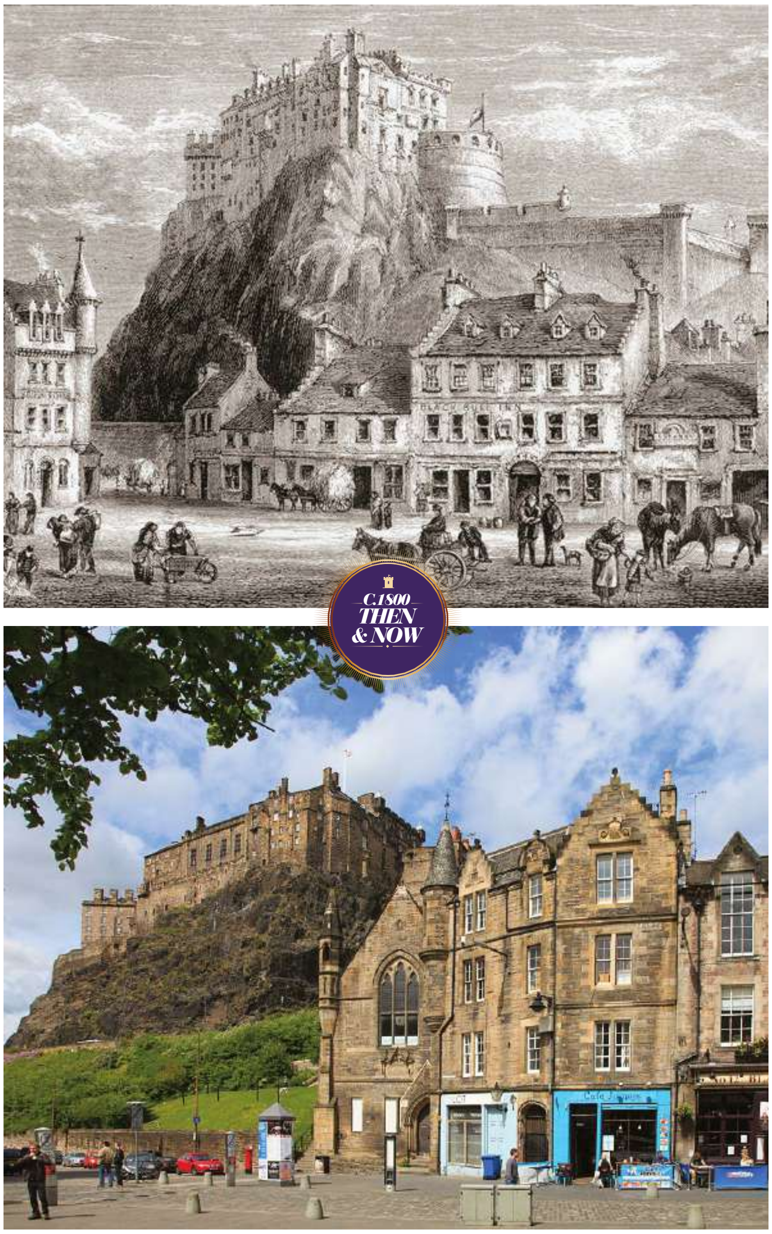
OPENING HOURS

APRIL – SEPTEMBER 9.30AM–6PM;
OCTOBER – MARCH 9.30AM–5PM

WEBSITE

WWW.EDINBURGHCASTLE.SCOT

Edinburgh Castle stands in pride of place atop an extinct volcano



with commanding views over the city and surrounding countryside – has made it highly prized as a symbol of military might and political power.

The castle rock was first occupied by Bronze Age settlers around 850 BCE and then as an Iron Age hill fort in the 1st century. In 600, the crag was occupied by the army of Gododdin, who called it Din Eidyn, before it was seized by the Angles, who changed its name to Edinburgh. These early fortifications did not survive, but we do know that by the 11th century, a structure of some substance stood on the rock. The castle became home to King Malcolm III of Scotland and his second wife, Margaret, the great-niece of Edward the Confessor. A devout Catholic, Margaret, who was later canonised, died at the castle in 1093. She is remembered there in its oldest surviving building, Saint Margaret's Chapel, an exquisitely simple structure that was probably constructed as a memorial by her son David I in 1130.

By the Middle Ages, the castle had been heavily fortified and had changed hands several times. Held by the English for 12 years from 1174, it was captured by Edward I (the 'hammer of the Scots') in 1296, and he stripped it of many of its treasures, including jewels and relics. In 1314, the earl of Moray, who seized it after a daring climb of the rock face, retook it for the Scots. This struggle for the castle continued over the centuries and it was besieged many times, most notably during the 'Lang Siege', which lasted from 1571 to 1573. Mary, Queen of Scots had given birth to James VI in the castle just a few years earlier. Though she had been forced to abdicate in her son's favour and had fled to captivity in England, the governor of the castle supported her claim to the throne. He doggedly held out against the regent James Douglas, Earl of Morton, who eventually attacked the castle with backup from English forces. Much of the castle was destroyed, and it was rebuilt by the victorious regent, who strengthened its defences with structures like the Half Moon Battery.

Although by now it had ceased to be a royal residence, with the nearby Palace of Holyroodhouse offering greater comforts, the castle was still utilised by royal visitors. In 1617, James VI (now also James I of England) used the castle to hold his jubilee celebrations and in 1633, his son Charles I spent the night before his Scottish coronation there (he had been crowned previously in England). The crowns of Scotland and England were now, of course, united and there was Scottish resentment at this Stuart monarch's execution in 1649. His son was proclaimed Charles II in Edinburgh, an act that infuriated Oliver Cromwell, who retaliated by invading Scotland in 1650 and besieging the castle for three months before it surrendered. The great hall, built in the early 16th century, was converted into barracks. Despite this republican presence, the Scots continued to show allegiance to the Stuart monarchs and, in 1651, Charles II was crowned king at Scone Palace in Perthshire – long before he was restored to the throne in England.

A peace descended on Edinburgh Castle but it was not to last – and once again the cause of the conflict was the Stuart succession. English Protestants had invited Mary, Charles II's Protestant niece, to take the throne along with her husband, William of Orange – in favour of her father, the Catholic James VII & II who had fled to France. Mary accepted and arrived in 1689. After some consideration, the Scottish parliament in Edinburgh agreed to support William and

SCOTLAND'S SITES OF REBELLION

KILLIECRANKIE

The beautiful Pass of Killiecrankie is a wooded gorge on the River Garry in Perthshire. It was the site of the first major battle of the Jacobite Risings, which took place on 27 July 1689 between government forces led by General Hugh Mackay and a large Jacobite army led by Viscount Dundee ('Bonnie Dundee'), who was killed in the battle. However, the Jacobites won.

GLENFINNAN

It was here, on 19 August 1745, that Charles Edward Stuart raised his standard signalling the start of the last Jacobite Rising. The Glenfinnan Monument commemorates this event. Erected in 1815 at the head of Loch Shiel, the 18-metre column is topped with the figure of a lone kilted Highlander. Visit nts.org.uk/Property/Glenfinnan-Monument/ for more.

SKYE

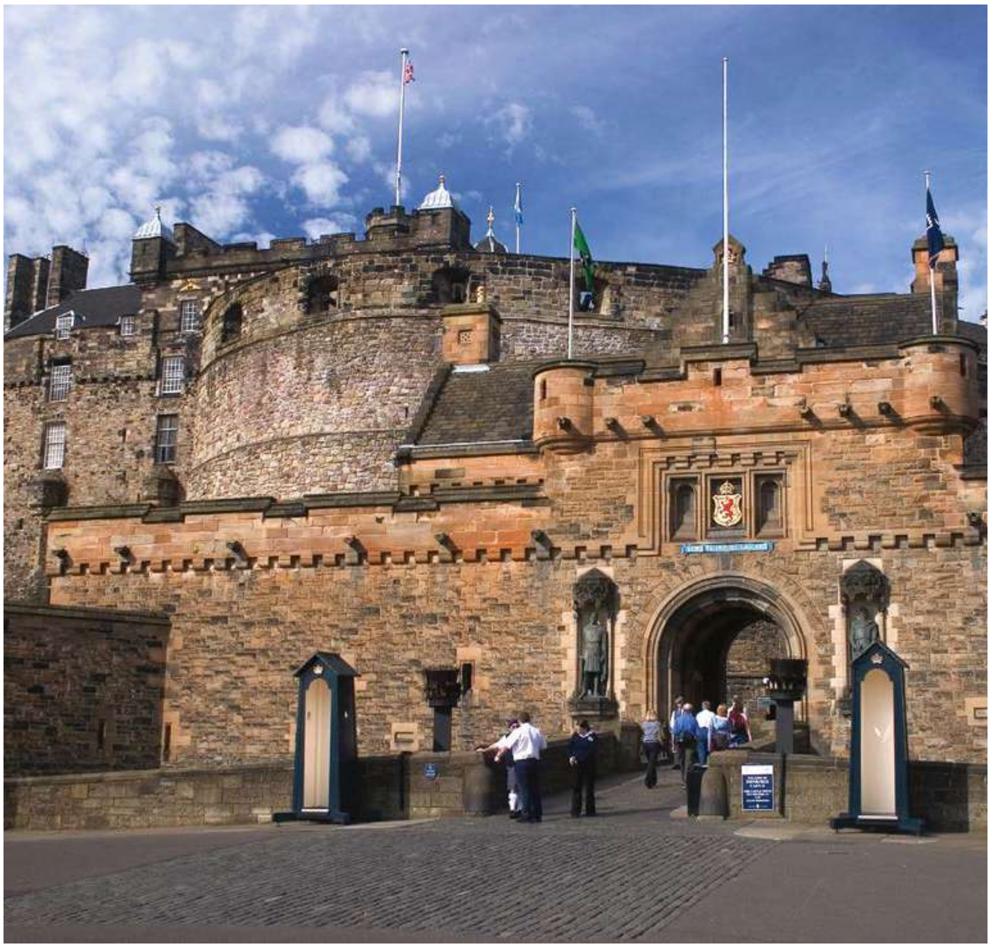
With bruised pride, Bonnie Prince Charlie sailed to Skye shortly after his defeat at Culloden. Visit Portree, the island's main town, where he bid farewell to Flora MacDonald in MacNab's Inn (which is now the Royal Hotel) and left to live the rest of his life in exile. Skye is surrounded by beautiful parks and wildlife and offers perfect hiking locations.

CULLODEN

This was the site of the battle where, on 16 April 1746, the Jacobite Rising of 1745 was ruthlessly crushed by government forces led by the duke of Cumberland. After this defeat, the Highland way of life ended forever. The battlefield has been restored as closely as possible to how it would have been during the battle, and a visitor centre tells its story.

TRAQUAIR HOUSE

This fascinating house on the Scottish border dates back to 1107. The family who lived here were staunch Jacobites, and after Bonnie Prince Charlie visited in 1745, the great Bear Gates were closed - the family swearing never to open them again until the Stuarts were back on the throne. You can visit the house today - just head to traquair.co.uk.



The main entrance to the castle, which will greet most visitors

Mary as monarchs, but many of the Scottish people continued to support the Jacobite claim to the throne. The governor of the castle, the duke of Gordon, was one. He had been appointed by King James and was determined to support his cause. Although he had a garrison of about 120 men and little ammunition, Gordon refused to surrender. It's said he even ignored a verbal message from James urging him to leave the castle and head north. Gordon declared himself "resolved to defend it to the last extremity". On 18 March, guards were placed around the castle but failed to storm it. The siege began.

There was a symbolic value in the possession of the castle for the Jacobites - the earl of Tyrconnell in Ireland sent a message saying they he would relieve the castle with 20,000 men if Gordon could hold out for six weeks. On 16 April 1689, John Graham of Claverhouse, 1st Viscount Dundee, raised James II's standard on a hilltop in Dundee, an

WHAT TO SEE AT THE CASTLE

MANY REMARKABLE SIGHTS AWAIT VISITORS TO EDINBURGH CASTLE TODAY – HERE ARE JUST A FEW OF THE HIGHLIGHTS

MONS MEG

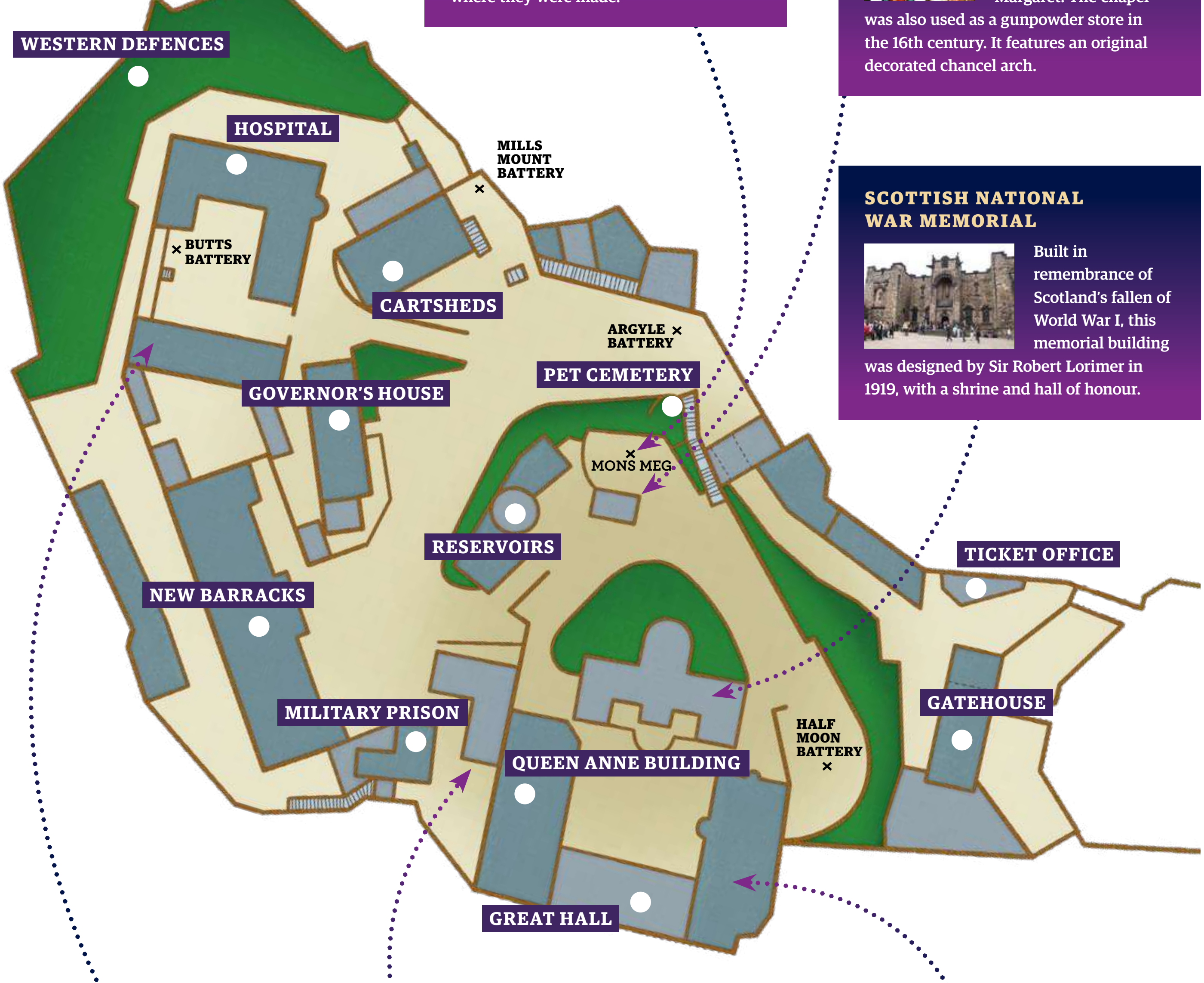
This is one of only two surviving bombard guns gifted to James II in 1457. The name refers to Mons in modern-day Belgium, where they were made.

SAINT MARGARET'S CHAPEL

This chapel is the oldest remaining part of the castle. It was built in 1130 by King David I, to commemorate the death of his mother, Queen Margaret. The chapel was also used as a gunpowder store in the 16th century. It features an original decorated chancel arch.

SCOTTISH NATIONAL WAR MEMORIAL

Built in remembrance of Scotland's fallen of World War I, this memorial building was designed by Sir Robert Lorimer in 1919, with a shrine and hall of honour.


WESTERN DEFENCES
HOSPITAL
MILLS MOUNT BATTERY
BUTTS BATTERY
CARTSHEDS
ARGYLE BATTERY
PET CEMETERY
GOVERNOR'S HOUSE
MONS MEG
RESERVOIRS
TICKET OFFICE
NEW BARRACKS
GATEHOUSE
MILITARY PRISON
HALF MOON BATTERY
QUEEN ANNE BUILDING
GREAT HALL

THE NATIONAL WAR MUSEUM

Edinburgh Castle is a fitting home for Scotland's museum dedicated to war. Within the building, you'll discover the stories of Scotland's military past through artefacts and exhibits, including personal items owned by soldiers.

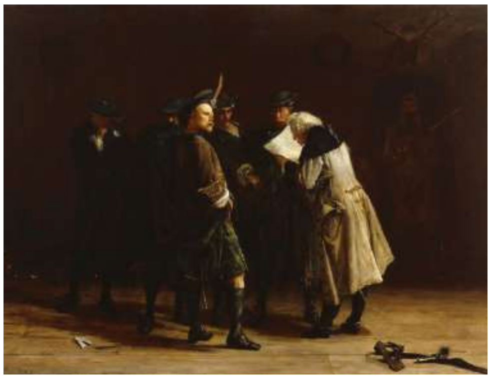
ROYAL SCOTS MUSEUM

This museum is entirely free to enter and is dependent upon the donations of visitors. It displays exhibits and information about the Royal Scots, the oldest infantry regiment of the line of the British Army.

ROYAL PALACE

This area of the castle has seen some of the most historically significant happenings, with Mary, Queen of Scots, giving birth to James VI here in 1566.

The Scottish crown jewels, on display at Edinburgh Castle



This painting by John Pettie, called Disbanded, shows a Highlander after the battle of Culloden

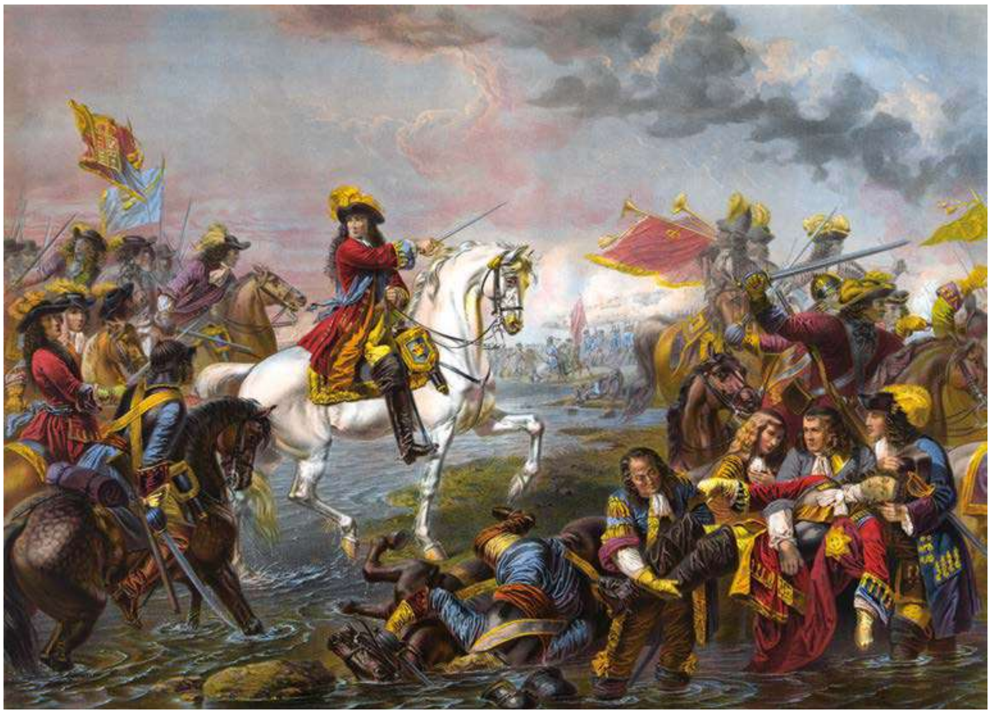
act that signalled the start of the first Jacobite rising. Government forces blockaded the castle, hoping to starve out the troops inside. Some say the garrison managed to keep up communications with its friends in the city by exchanging signals with Anne Smith, granddaughter of the bishop of Galloway, who had a conveniently placed window in her home. The castle was regularly bombarded – one cannonade reducing morale by damaging a cask containing the garrison's ale. Gordon refrained from returning fire, although some reports state that a small shot from the castle "killed one woman, two men, two horses and a dog".

The siege lasted throughout April and May and into June, by which time conditions inside had deteriorated considerably: the water supply ran low, troops were sick (15 skeletons found buried in the castle are thought to be those of besieged garrison soldiers), food was running out and there was little ammunition. Events outside were changing rapidly and although Viscount Dundee was successfully rallying troops to support the Jacobite cause, the government had charged General Hugh Mackay with leading a large opposition to quell the rebellion. Gordon received signal that there was no chance of relief. On 14 June he surrendered the badly damaged castle and the exhausted garrison marched out. It was the last time it was to be held for the Jacobite cause.

Although the Jacobites successfully beat Mackay's forces at the Battle of Killiecrankie, Viscount Dundee was killed. In 1690, William of Orange defeated James VII & II's troops at the Battle of the Boyne in Ireland and it seemed that the cause was lost. However, in 1715 there was another Jacobite rising and the castle was once again to become the focus of attention – a potent symbol of power for those who laid claim to the throne.

The arrival of a new monarch, George I, the ruler of Hanover, stirred Jacobite sentiments – particularly in Scotland where many were already unhappy about the establishment of a political union with England in 1707. Although James II had died, his son James Francis Edward Stuart ('the Old Pretender' sometimes referred to as James VIII & III) was living in exile. In 1715, the earl of Mar successfully rallied the clans at Braemar to support the Stuart claim to the throne. Possession of Edinburgh Castle would have given an enormous symbolic, as well as strategic, boost to the movement. There was a financial incentive too, for a large stock of gold was held within its walls. Lord Drummond, son of the duke of Perth, determined to seize this prize, summoned men to help him – a band of Highlanders and a number of Edinburgh Jacobites. The castle garrison was weak and possibly sympathetic, and at least one former prisoner thought the best way to take it would be to encourage the porter to leave the main gate unlocked and gain entry that way.

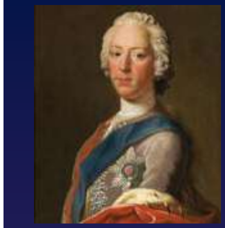
However, this suggesion was rejected in favour of a more flamboyant plan, which was to be led by Doctor William Arthur, professor of botany, and his brother Thomas, who had served as an ensign at the castle. They bribed the sentries on the inside to let down a line to which a rope ladder could be fixed; the party would then ascend and take the castle.



William of Orange leading his army to victory over James II in the Battle of Boyne in July 1690

TOWARDS THE '45 REBELLION'

WHAT WERE THE DECIDING FACTORS THAT LED TO EDINBURGH CASTLE COMING UNDER SIEGE IN 1745?


The famous 1745 'lost portrait' of Bonnie Prince Charles

The Jacobite Rebellion of 1745 was the culmination of decades of disagreement about who should succeed the throne. The Jacobites enthusiastically supported the Stuart succession to the thrones of Scotland and England, which had been united in 1603 when James VI of Scotland ascended the English throne as James I. After the Stuart monarch Charles II died without any legitimate children, his younger brother succeeded as James VII & II.

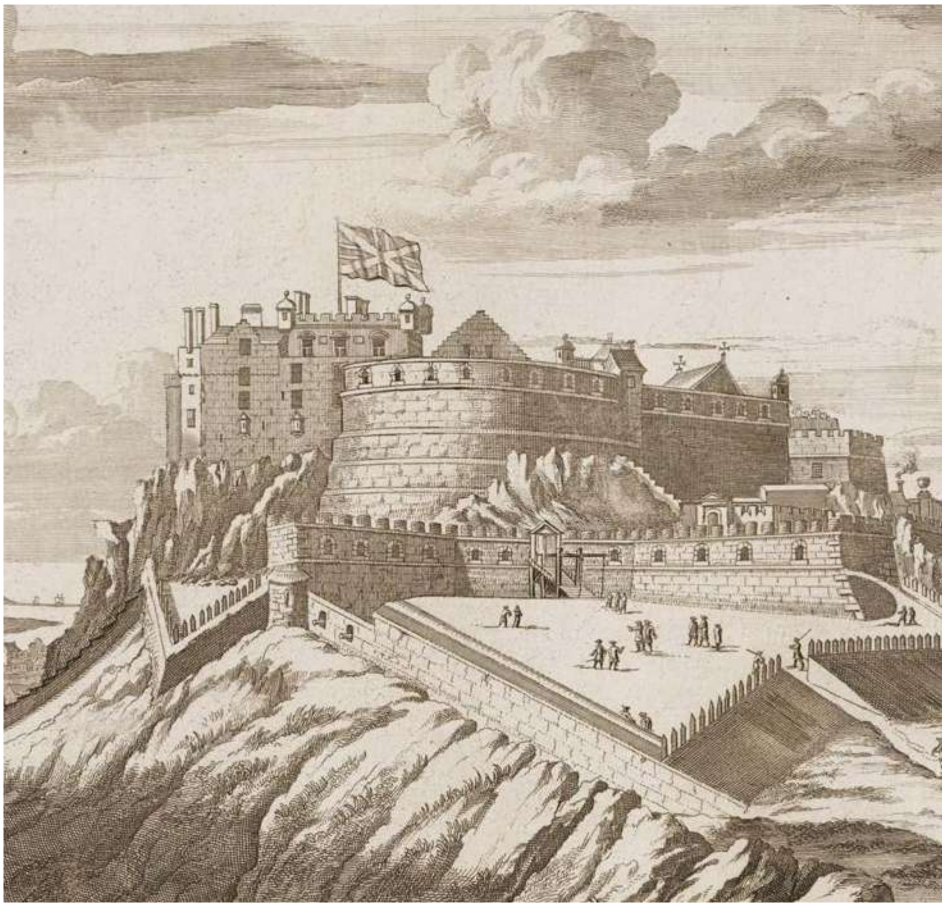
However, while Charles had married a Catholic, he had been careful to establish his Protestant credentials and even arranged his niece Mary's marriage to a Protestant prince, William of Orange. James was less politically astute and not only married a Catholic, but converted to Catholicism himself. When his wife gave birth to a boy, James Francis Edward Stuart, fears were raised that a Catholic dynasty was to be established. William of Orange landed an army in England and James fled to France; he was deposed and the crown passed to William and Mary.

Over the years, the Jacobite movement became entangled within a host of issues, both religious and political. It is frequently portrayed as a solely Scottish cause, but there were many English, French and Irish Jacobites, while many Scots supported the status quo. There were five risings all together, the first in 1689 after William and Mary ascended the throne. Although the Jacobites defeated government forces at the Battle of Killiecrankie, expeditions were mounted to subdue the Highlands, and in January 1692 they surrendered to the government. However after the massacre at Glencoe just weeks later, relations were soured.

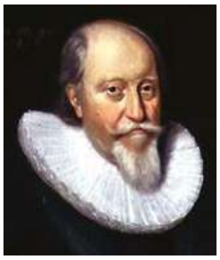
In 1708, James VII & II's son, the exiled James Francis Edward Stuart - proclaimed James VIII & III by his followers - attempted to invade and claim the throne. He set sail from Dunkirk with a French fleet and tried to land in the Firth of Forth. However, his attempt was thwarted by the Royal Navy and he sailed back to France.

There was a major uprising in 1715, after the British crown passed to Queen Anne's nearest Protestant relative, her third cousin Prince George of Hanover. The accession of George I revived hopes for the restoration of the Stuart monarchs. A 10,000-strong Jacobite army fought government troops commanded by the duke of Argyll, chief of the clan Campbell, at the Battle of Sherrifmuir. They failed to capitalise on their victory and James VIII & III did not arrive in Scotland until after the battle. When he fled back to France early in 1716, the rising was over.

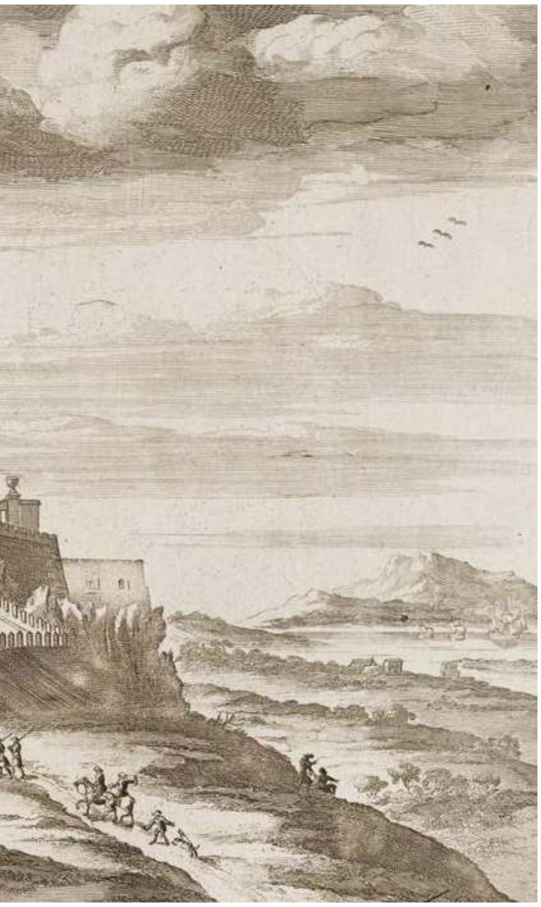
In 1719, a Jacobite force, supported by Spanish frigates, landed in Scotland and held Eilean Donan Castle for a short time. However, they found little local support and the rising was soon quashed.

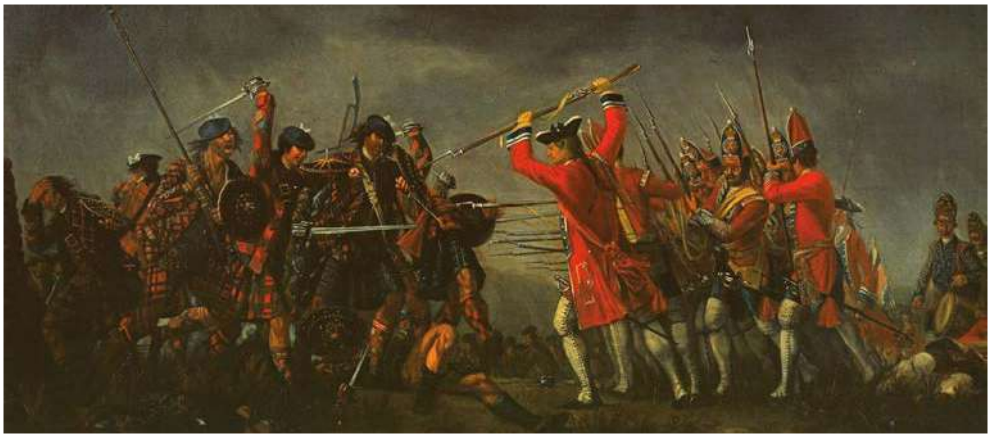


"SPECTATORS FLOCKED TO SEE THIS TALL, REGAL FIGURE, DRESSED IN A TARTAN COAT, A BLUE AND GOLD SASH AND BOOTS"


The Earl of Mar successfully rallied clans to support the Stuart claim

Lord Drummond had the rope ladder specially made: it came in two sections and was wide enough to allow several men to climb at once. If the assault was successful, the rebels were to inform the earl of Mar by lighting a chain of beacons and firing the castle's guns. The raid was to take place on 8 August at 11pm, an hour before the sentries made their round. Some of the conspirators assembled in an Edinburgh tavern early in the evening to finalise arrangements; reports





The famous 1745 'lost portrait' of Bonnie Prince Charles

The north east view of Edinburgh Castle as depicted by John Slezer

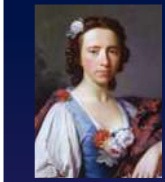
afterwards claimed one was disguised with a beard and red coat; another - rather improbably - was wearing a nightgown. The rest of the party were dotted about the city, drinking in various taverns and raucously toasting their success - so much so that they were overheard.

The plan was that the rebels should rendezvous beside Saint Cuthbert's Church at the foot of the castle rock between 9pm and 10pm. However, some stayed in the taverns drinking to "good news from the castle". The rope ladder, which should have been collected earlier in the evening, was still receiving final adjustments and the 11pm deadline was missed. Although the ladder eventually appeared, the sentries became nervous and instead of hauling it up and fixing it into place, dropped it back over the wall - then fired on the Jacobites, who fled. The plot had failed, and an informer (possibly a sharp-eared innkeeper) had forewarned the authorities. However, only four rebels were captured and only one was hanged for his part in the plot; Doctor Arthur escaped and continued to fight for the Jacobite cause. Lieutenant-Colonel James Steuart, deputy governor of the castle, was suspected of being a Jacobite sympathiser and dismissed from his post for failing to act on the intelligence received - although some sources suggest he probably did, reluctantly, save the castle for the king.

Although the plot had failed, it had come uncomfortably close. Should the earl of Mar have gained Edinburgh Castle, he would doubtless have brought his troops to the capital and greatly increased James's chances of taking the throne. As it was, in November 1715, after Mar's forces clashed with the duke of Argyll's government army at the Battle of Sherrifmuir, Mar failed to capitalise on his perceived victory and, rather than marching south, merely withdrew.

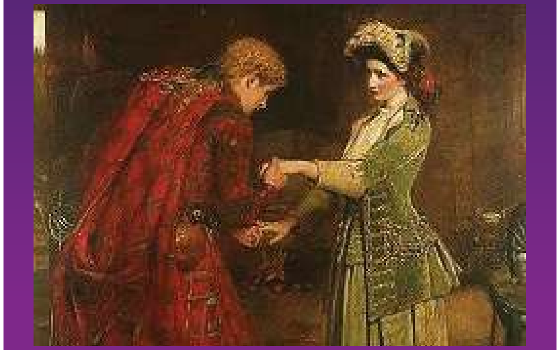
The last great defence of Edinburgh Castle was during the Jacobite Rising of 1745. Relations between Britain and France had deteriorated throughout 1744 and plans were made for the French to invade southern England

FLORA MACDONALD



It was Flora MacDonald, stepdaughter of a captain in the government army, who famously helped Bonnie Prince Charlie to evade capture following the Jacobite defeat at Culloden. Her cousin asked her to help the prince and they set off in Flora's boat from Culla Bay on the tiny island of Benbecula, to sail "over the sea" to Skye. The prince was disguised as an Irish servant girl, under the name of Betty Burke. Flora later told that it rained heavily on the crossing and the prince sang to her to akeep her spirits up. He said farewell to her on Skye and escaped into exile, however Flora was arrested and taken to London where she was imprisoned. She was released in 1747 and became quite a celebrity.

She got married on her return to Scotland and she and her husband entertained Johnson and Boswell when they visited Skye on their famous tour of the Western Isles. Johnson described her as having "soft features, gentle manners and elegant presence". The family emigrated to North Carolina and purchased an estate; it's said that she took with her the sheet in which the prince had lain, declaring that it should serve as her shroud. When the Wars of Independence broke out, she and her husband supported the Hanoverian George III. They returned to Skye where she died in March 1790. She was apparently wrapped in the shroud and buried in Kilmuir cemetery.



Flora McDonald says goodbye to Bonnie Prince Charlie in this painting by George William Joy

EVENTS IN EDINBURGH

WHAT ELSE IS THERE TO DO IN THE SCOTTISH CASTLE AND CAPITAL?

Credit. wiki. Gary Campbell-Hall

MILITARY TATTOO

It's one of Edinburgh's most famous events, and it's easy to see why. Taking place at Edinburgh Castle in August every year, the Military Tattoo is a spectacle of light and sound. See the lone piper against the stunning backdrop of the castle and watch military marching bands parade before your very eyes. To find out more, head to www.edintattoo.co.uk.

Credit. wiki. Gareth Davies

EDINBURGH FESTIVAL FRINGE

The world's largest arts festival takes place in Edinburgh every August. With comedy, plays, music and much more at countless venues all around the city, there's something for everyone, from children to grandparents. There's a mix of free and paid events every year, and you're guaranteed to have a great time.

Credit. wiki. Kim Traynor

EDINBURGH INTERNATIONAL BOOK FESTIVAL

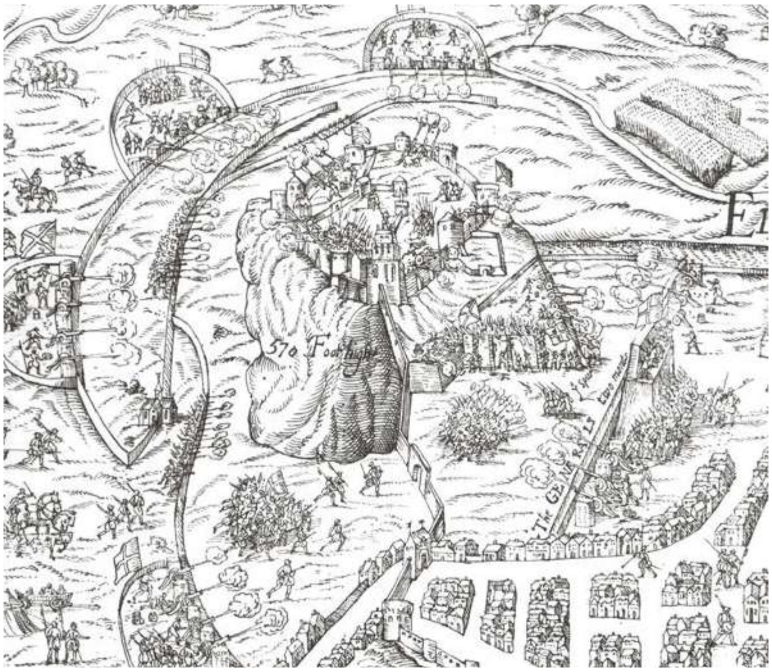
In the last three weeks of August each year, you can catch the International Book Festival in Edinburgh. With talks, debates and long-established children's proramme, it's perfect for every bookworm in the family. For more information, visit www.edbookfest.co.uk.

GUN SALUTES

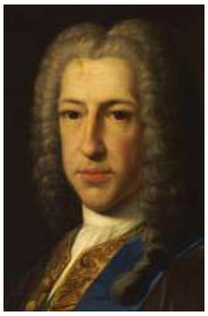
Ever wanted to see a proper gun salute? Edinburgh Castle hosts several throughout the year, and the ticket is included in your admission to the castle itself. And don't miss the One o'Clock Gun, fired every day (except Sundays, Good Friday and Christmas Day) at 1pm. Crowds flock to the 105mm field gun at the Mills Mount Battery to see it.

AFTERNOON TEA

For those searching for a special treat, look no further than the afternoon tea experience at Edinburgh Castle. With various sittings throughout the year, tickets start at £40 for non-members, but also include regular admission to the castle. It's the perfect gift for loved ones, and the menu can be found on Edinburgh Castle's website.



Edinburgh Castle, in an illustration dating from the 16th century



Fears over the beginning of a Catholic dynasty began with James Francis Edward Stuart's birth

using Charles Edward Stuart (James VIII & III's son, often called the 'Young Pretender') as their figurehead. Although it was called off, Charles was unwilling to give up on the adventure and, in July 1745, landed on the Isle of Eriskay in the Outer Hebrides hoping to rally the clans to his cause. A combination of charisma, promises of French aid and a commitment to abolish the union with England allowed him to gather enough support. So on 19 August 1745, Charles raised his father's standard at Glenfinnan in front of about 1,200 men.

Making good use of the military roads that were constructed for the government by General Wade, the Jacobite forces moved south swiftly and took the city of Edinburgh on 17 September. Charles left the castle well alone at first and made a triumphal entry into the Palace of Holyroodhouse. Spectators at the palace all flocked to see this tall, regal figure dressed in a tartan coat, a blue and gold sash and boots. Perched on his head was a blue velvet bonnet adorned with a white cockade. Charles remained in the city for three more days, allowing his troops to rest, before marching south to Prestonpans where he comprehensively defeated Sir John Cope's government forces.

Charles returned to the capital but the castle, under the control of General Guest along with General

The Great Hall, at the heart of Edinburgh Castle, was completed in 1511 for James IV

“THE STANDARDS THAT THE HIGHLANDERS HAD CARRIED WERE REMOVED FROM THE BATTLEFIELD AND EXHIBITED AS SPOILS OF WAR”

Preston, continued to hold out. Some reports suggest that Guest refused a bribe to surrender the fortress, while others pain him as sympathetic to the Jacobite cause and only persuaded to resist by Preston, a staunch Hanoverian. Whatever the truth, there was initially a prudent truce, for the castle's defences had been improved a few years before and Charles knew he was unlikely to take it by force. The Highlanders guarded the approach to the castle but allowed provisions to enter on the tacit understanding that they were not attacked.

The truce ended on 29 September when the garrison was deemed to have fired from the castle. A blockade was instituted, but General Guest, aware of his strategic advantage, sent a letter to the Edinburgh authorities demanding that provisioning resume or he would bombard the city. The people appealed to Charles, who wrote back threatening reprisals on the estates of all those in the castle. Another truce was agreed, but swiftly broken when the Jacobites fired on people delivering goods to the castle. The garrison retaliated and, at midday on 4 October, General Preston warned townspeople living close to the castle that they should flee their homes. Many did so.

The bombardment began and increased in severity throughout the day, raining cannon balls down on the city. When it grew dark, a party left the castle, dug a trench and planted more cannon across Castlehill. They also set fire to several deserted houses and traumatised the townspeople.

The Highlanders, skilled in hand-to-hand combat but severely lacking in heavy artillery, were no match for such an assault - and nor could Charles risk alienating the citizens of Edinburgh, as without their support his cause was all but doomed. He needed to march south into England if he wished his mission to be in any way successful and he had no time for a prolonged siege, so he made a virtue of a necessity and issued a proclamation lifting the blockade. In it, he expressed his regret “that we are hourly informed of the many murders which are committed upon the innocent inhabitants of this city, by the inhuman commanders and garrison of the castle of Edinburgh”. Instead of taking reprisals against the castle's commanders, he declared that it would not be “derogatory to the glory of a prince to suspend punishment… when thereby the lives of innocent men can be saved”.

Charles remained in the capital for several more weeks and amassed an army of 5,000-6,000 men; the castle, however, remained a government stronghold. At the end of October, the Jacobites left Edinburgh to march into England hoping to gather more support once they crossed over the border. But although they made rapid progress, they left Scotland unsecured and government forces easily retook control of much of the country.

The assumed support from English Jacobites failed to materialise and although they got as far south as Derby, Charles was eventually persuaded that an assault on London would be disastrous and so his army marched back up to Scotland.

Bonnie Prince Charlie never returned to Edinburgh, and in April 1746, his forces were brutally defeated at the Battle of Culloden. The standards that the Highlanders had carried were removed from the battlefield and taken to Edinburgh Castle, where they were exhibited as spoils of war. The Jacobite Risings were over.

MUST-SEE HIGHLAND CASTLES

THE HIGHLANDS OF SCOTLAND ARE FILLED WITH BREATHTAKING SCENERY AND A PLETHORA OF EXCELLENT CASTLES TO VISIT

EILEAN DONAN CASTLE

A BEAUTIFUL CASTLE IN A STUNNING PART OF SCOTLAND

DORNIE, SCOTLAND

This 13th-century fortification cuts an iconic Scottish image. Destroyed during the Jacobite rebellions, restoration work was carried out at the turn of the 20th century, and it has been featured in many films such as *Highlander* and *The Wicker Man*.

ENTRY FEE

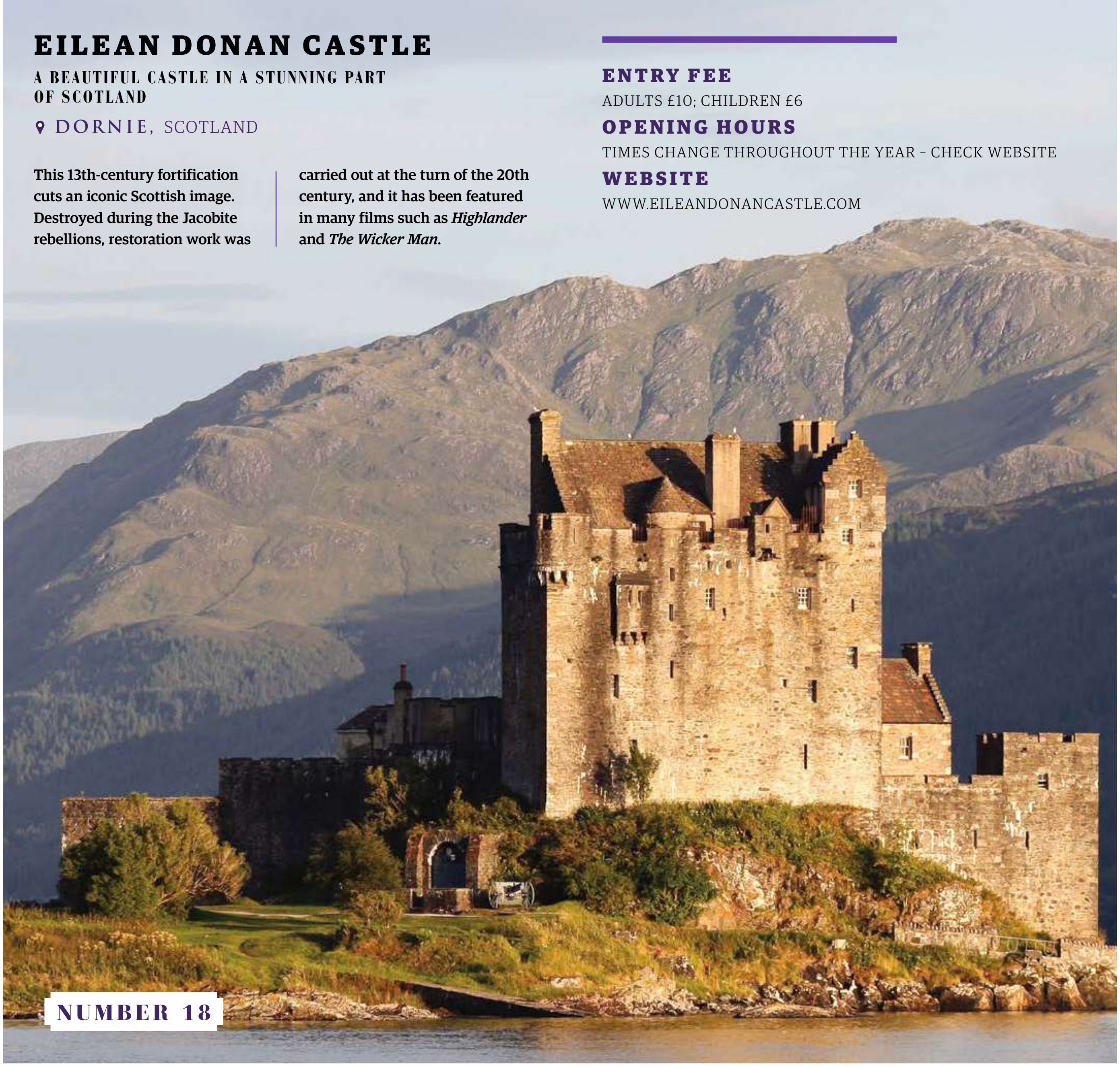
ADULTS £10; CHILDREN £6

OPENING HOURS

TIMES CHANGE THROUGHOUT THE YEAR – CHECK WEBSITE

WEBSITE

WWW.EILEANDONANCASTLE.COM



NUMBER 18

CAWDOR CASTLE

A STUNNING CASTLE AND GARDENS

CAWDOR, SCOTLAND

The historic home of the Thane of Cawdor and famed for its literary connections (including Shakespeare's Macbeth), this romantic 14th-century castle is sure to delight. Importantly, the castle does not get overshadowed by its connection to the Bard, and actually possesses an intriguing history of its own.

ENTRY FEE

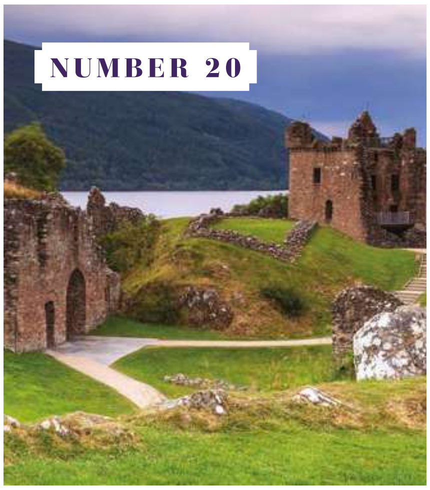
ADULTS £13.50; CHILDREN £7.50

OPENING HOURS

11 APRIL – 4 OCTOBER 10AM–5.30PM

WEBSITE

WWW.CAWDORCASTLE.COM



URQUHART CASTLE

A RUINED BEAUTY ON THE LOCHSIDE

INVERNESS, SCOTLAND

Once one of the largest castles in Scotland, Urquhart changed hands between England and Scotland during the Wars of Independence. Situated on the picturesque banks of the famous Loch Ness, these impressive remains are packed with an outstanding array of history as well as important historical artefacts that are just waiting to be discovered.

ENTRY FEE

ADULTS £12; CHILDREN £7.20

OPENING HOURS

9.30AM–6PM

WEBSITE

WWW.HISTORIC-SCOTLAND.GOV.UK

NUMBER 21

CASTLE SINCLAIR GIRNIGOE

A MARVEL IN THE FAR NORTH

CAITHNESS, SCOTLAND

Located on the northern tip of Scotland, this castle, built by Clan Sinclair sometime in the 15th century, commands an awesome view over the coast and North Sea. This exquisite ruin is also the only castle in Scotland to be listed by the World Monuments Fund.

ENTRY FEE

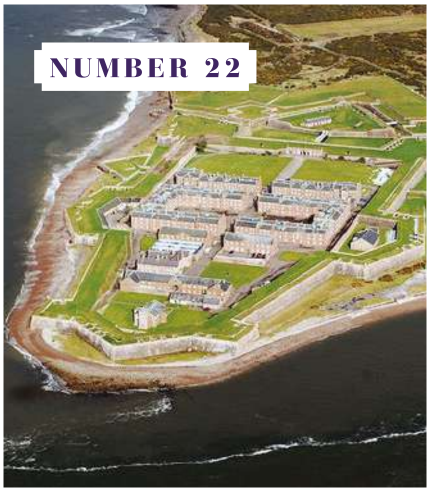
FREE

OPENING HOURS

OPEN ALL YEAR

WEBSITE

WWW.CASTLESINCLAIRGIRNIGOE.ORG



FORT GEORGE

A FORT FIT FOR A KING

INVERNESS, SCOTLAND

A strong contender for the mightiest artillery fort in all of Europe, Fort George was built after the final Jacobite rebellion in 1746. Its building and defences are still in excellent condition today and these, coupled with its vast arms collection, truly make it a Highland must-see for military enthusiasts.

ENTRY FEE

ADULTS £9; CHILDREN £5.40

OPENING HOURS

APRIL – SEPTEMBER 9.30AM–5.30PM;
OCTOBER – MARCH 10AM–4PM

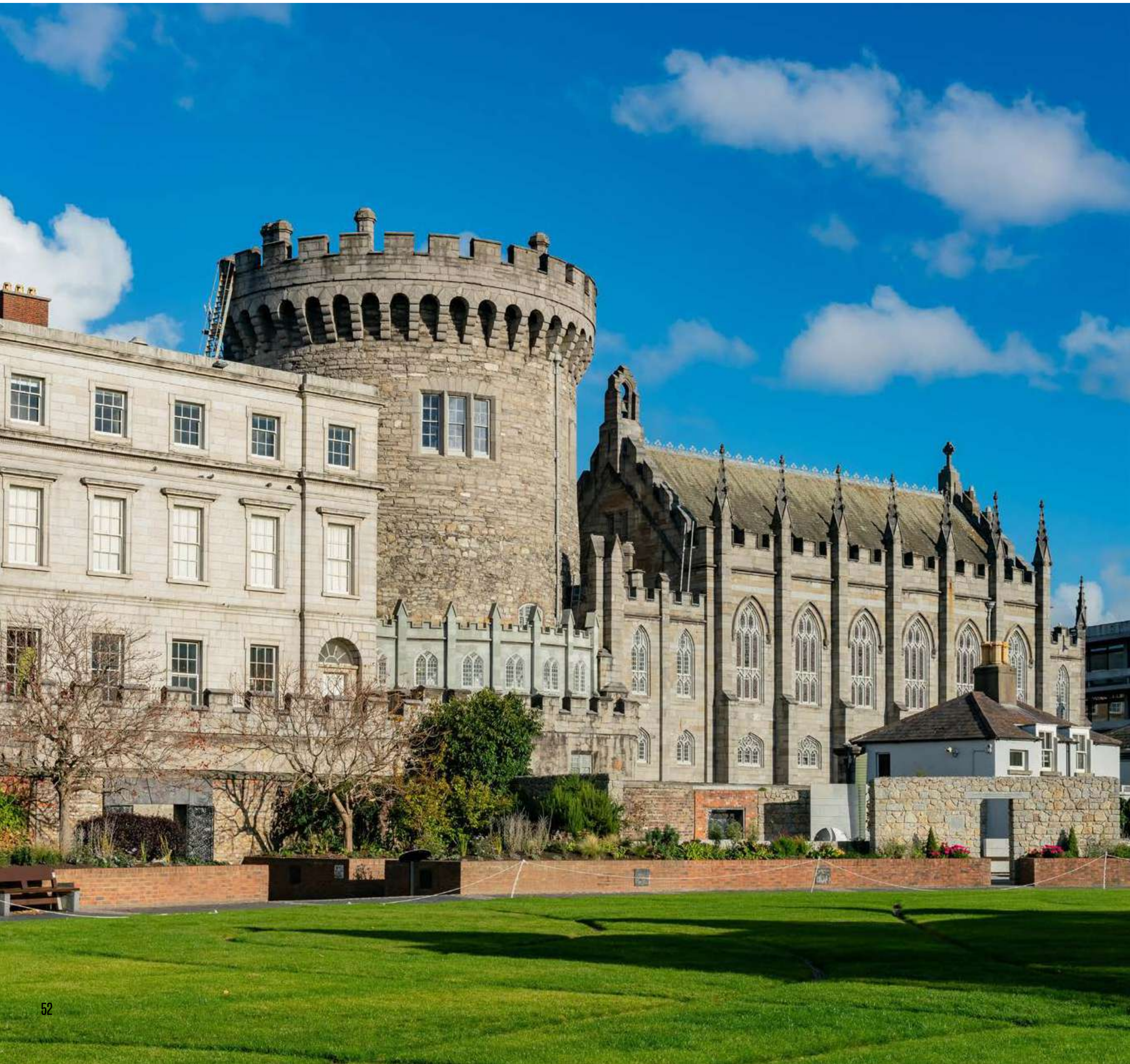
WEBSITE

WWW.HISTORIC-SCOTLAND.GOV.UK

NUMBER

23

DUBLIN
IRELAND



ENTRY FEE
ADULTS €8; CHILDREN €4

OPENING HOURS
9.45AM–5.45PM

WEBSITE
WWW.DUBLINCASTLE.IE

DUBLIN CASTLE

It was the centre of English and British rule in Ireland, but the origins of Dublin Castle actually go further back than many realise. Under the remains of the Medieval structure – a considerable amount of this castle was destroyed in a fire in 1684 – lie some of the original defences from Viking Dublin, which can be seen by visitors. Above ground, you can join the quarter of a million visitors a year who come to indulge in the building's beauty and rich history.

101 WORLD'S GREATEST CASTLES

WINDSOR CASTLE

FOUNDED BY WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR ALMOST 1,000 YEARS AGO, THE WORLD'S LARGEST AND OLDEST OCCUPIED CASTLE IS STILL USED BY THE ROYAL FAMILY

BERKSHIRE
ENGLAND

NUMBER

24

WORDS BY ◆ JAMES PRICE

© Getty

With over 1,000 rooms and covering 52,000 square metres, Windsor Castle truly is a residence fit for royalty. It's been called home by 39 English and British monarchs and thousands of other people over the centuries, and has occupied a unique position in the lives of the royal family through multiple changes in dynasty.

Its towering walls and splendorous apartments have housed some of the most iconic people in British history, but it's also no mere relic of a bygone era - Windsor Castle still plays a role in royal society today. It is a favourite weekend retreat of Queen Elizabeth

ENTRY FEE

ADULTS £22.50; CHILDREN £13

OPENING HOURS

NOVEMBER – FEBRUARY 10AM–4.15PM

MARCH – OCTOBER 10AM–5.15PM

WEBSITE

WWW.RCT.UK

The Long Walk, a path stretching for several kilometres away from the castle, offers stunning views of the castle

II and also hosts ceremonial and diplomatic functions – just as it has done for centuries. Windsor Castle, the largest and oldest castle to still be occupied in the world, is unique not just for its history but for its continuing relevance today.

Windsor Castle has been a hugely important part of royal life for nearly a whole millennium. It was chosen as a location suitable for a castle by William the Conqueror in around 1070, following his successful campaign to conquer England in 1066. Windsor was strategically important for control of the River Thames west of London, and was part of a ring of castles built around London and a far larger castle-building program across England, as William sought to stamp his authority on his new lands.

This early construct was nothing like the palatial behemoth of modern times, but was instead a simple wood-and-earth motte and bailey design. The motte section can still be seen today, now dominated by the Round Tower in the centre of the castle. A second bailey was later added, and the general shape of these can still be seen in the castle's design, with the lower ward and the upper ward divided by the Round Tower forming the basic footprint of the castle that can be explored now.

The castle was particularly favoured by monarchs because of its close proximity to both London and old royal hunting grounds, which were listed in the Domesday Book in the 1080s. As hunting remained such a popular pastime for royalty and the nobility until very recently, it was an appealing quality that helped elevate Windsor from a mere strategic construct to a favoured residence.

In fact, Windsor Castle's royal association is hard to overstate. It has been home to 39 English and British monarchs over the centuries. The first monarch to take up residence was Henry I in around 1110. Successive monarchs then expanded and improved the castle, adding stone walls and building additional royal apartments.

Though the castle was first intended for military purposes, it saw remarkably little fighting. Forces loyal to King John, of Magna Carta fame, withstood sieges in the early 13th century, but the castle's defences were rarely tested otherwise. Instead, it is as a palace that it has seen the most action.

Although it's seen limited martial action, the imposing fortifications have represented a safe haven to numerous monarchs, and its power and location made it the perfect place to ride out any threat or storm.

In the 14th century Edward III spent huge sums of money transforming the castle into his palatial seat of power. Though later monarchs tore up or modified much of the Gothic architecture from his reign, some examples remain, not least the undercroft – a surprisingly large room considering it was mainly used to store food and wine. This Medieval room will soon be a unique cafe for visitors, as it is being modified as part of the castle's ongoing transformation.

The huge castle and its grounds were worked and reworked even more over the centuries, introducing new fashions and erasing the old, but there are countless clues and hints to its extraordinary past as the favoured seat of successive rulers. Remnants from other monarchs that visitors can see include Henry VIII's gateway, Charles II's Baroque ceilings and George IV's comprehensive reformations, notably his work to raise the height of the imposing Round Tower and the walls to add dramatic effect. St George's Chapel, meanwhile, reveals architectural design from Edward IV's reign, as well as a stunning ceiling installed by Henry VII.

Every room and corner of the vast castle complex is steeped in royal history, and these little stories and hidden secrets can still be felt and imagined as you wander through the glamour and ornamentation – Windsor Castle's greatest appeal is not in its splendour, but the human stories that lie just behind the sparkling facade.

© Getty

St George's Hall was completely ripped apart by fire in 1992, but careful restoration work has returned it to a glorious hall

> **"ARTWORK PORTRAYING CHARLES CAN ALSO BE FOUND DURING THE TOUR"**

There are stories to be seen everywhere through the architecture and artefacts collected within the castle. One such example is Henry VIII's armour. Shaped to encompass his more rotund frame, it reveals so much of the infamous man who wore it than we could learn from anything else – his height, stature and increasing waistline as he aged and engaged in more extravagant meals and behaviour. Visitors can compare this to the more idyllic portrait of Henry VIII that hangs in the Queen's Drawing Room in Windsor Castle, looking fierce and strong. An understanding of this iconic man can also be found in St George's Chapel, where he is buried – along with his third wife, Jane Seymour, which suggests his great esteem for her over his other wives.

Signs of Elizabeth I's personality can also be gleaned from the castle. The North Terrace, which boasts stunning views across the town, was installed by Elizabeth as a favourite place to walk, exercise and think. Visitors can follow in her footsteps and stroll along the same stretch of wall as one of the most famous women in British history.

Perhaps one of the darkest periods for the castle was during the Interregnum – the period from 1649 to 1660, following the English Civil War, when England did not have a king. After Charles I's defeat and execution, he was buried in St George's Chapel in Windsor Castle, where his body still resides to this day. Much of the castle's artwork and finery was looted or sold, and the castle fell into disrepair.

Upon the restoration of the monarchy, Charles II restored Windsor Castle and laboured to recover much of the artwork that had been lost. He lavished the castle with art, furniture and decoration to rival anything else in Europe. He chose the resting place of his executed father for this lavish project – a symbolic gesture to announce the triumphant return and supremacy of the monarchy once more.

Some of the rooms designed and decorated for Charles can still be seen during tours of the state rooms, where the spectacular Baroque ceilings and artwork can be appreciated. Artwork portraying Charles can also be found during the tour, each piece reflecting his divine right to rule and reflecting his power. Seeing these artefacts in the rooms Charles once inhabited, in the site where his executed father lays, adds a unique insight into his otherwise-questionable extravagences in life.

The state rooms also offer a glimpse into how very different courtly life was for Charles II, as well as his wife, Catherine of Braganza. Visitors are taken through a sequence of their private rooms, each one smaller and more intimate than the last, where only the most trusted courtiers and attendants were granted access. The queen's large presence chamber leads on to waiting rooms, dining rooms and finally private rooms, and access was tightly controlled.

Access to the king, too, was controlled, but his rooms reveal his life to be both private and controlled but also conversely public. His reception rooms and drawing rooms lead on to his bedroom, which was still a key room of courtly life. As he withdrew to bed each night the king granted access to trusted courtiers to witness it, and again to attend him as he awoke. Even this most private moment was a courtly ritual and a show of favouritism and jostling for position to be near the king. Visitors can also pass through the king's closet, which only Charles and one trusted servant had keys to, and which represents perhaps the only private space he ever enjoyed.

The life of Victoria is also closely linked to Windsor Castle, bringing a wave of sadness and mourning. Using it as her primary residence, her beloved husband, Prince Albert, died in the Blue Room at the castle, and the queen then kept the room as a shrine to him, spending many hours there in prayer. The whole residence was kept in mourning for years, a blanket of morose reflection draped over the grand halls and rooms. Though these rooms are not on display, it is easy to imagine Victoria's affection for her husband as she moved through the drawing rooms and dining rooms of the castle. She now rests alongside Albert very close by, in Frogmore, just a short walk from the castle.

Windsor Castle has been so central to royal life that the royal family adopted Windsor as the family name in 1917, abandoning the name Saxe-Coburg and Gotha. Britain was locked in war with Germany at the time, and following raids on London by German Gotha bombers, George V decided to take a more British name. This relation to the castle is reflected in the royal badge of the House of

The changing of the guard, as the Household Guard change shifts, is an almost ritualistic process that can be seen each day >

© Getty

A ROYAL CONNECTION

THE ROYAL FAMILY HAVE HELD CASTLES IN EVERY CORNER OF BRITAIN

CAERNARFON CASTLE

GWYNEDD, WALES

Originally a motte-and-bailey castle from the 11th century, Caernarfon was transformed in the 13th century by Edward I into a powerful statement of control over northern Wales. Its walls and towers are impeccably preserved, offering a romantic vision of what life in a castle was like, and is surrounded by a small harbour and town that illustrate the castle's stature.

25

© Getty

ENTRY FEE

ADULT £9.90;
CHILDREN £6

OPENING HOURS

JULY - 1 AUGUST
9.30AM-6PM;
SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER
9.30AM-5PM;
NOVEMBER - FEBRUARY
10AM-4PM

WEBSITE

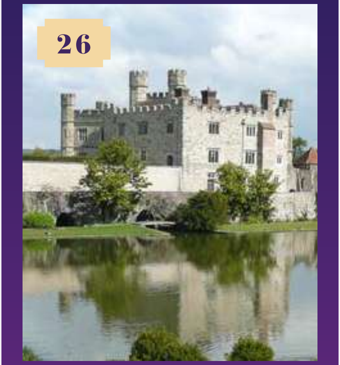
WWW.CADW.GOV.WALES/VISIT/PLACES-TO-VISIT/CAERNARFON-CASTLE

LEEDS CASTLE

KENT, ENGLAND

Nestled on an island lake and reached by an ornate stone bridge, this idyllic castle is beautiful and romantic, but it was first built in the 12th century as a defensive structure. Used by kings, such as Henry VIII and most notably his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, it has a strong royal connection. Its peaceful setting has also made it a perfect location for diplomatic talks in modern times.

26



ENTRY FEE

ADULTS £26;
CHILDREN £17.50

OPENING HOURS

OCTOBER - MARCH
10.30AM-4PM;
APRIL - SEPTEMBER
10.30AM-5.30PM

WEBSITE

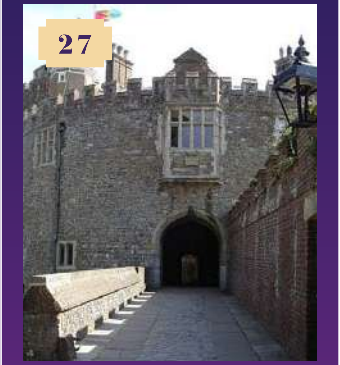
WWW.LEEDS-CASTLE.COM

WALMER CASTLE

KENT, ENGLAND

Built by Henry VIII as a fortress to defend the south of England from French invasion, like many other castles with a royal connection it soon developed into a home, shaking off its martial beginnings. Today, exhibitions reveal the lives of some of the famous people who have stayed at the castle - including the duke of Wellington - and is surrounded by stunning gardens and landscapes.

27



ENTRY FEE

ADULTS £12.20;
CHILDREN £7.30

OPENING HOURS

10AM-5PM

WEBSITE

WWW.ENGLISH-HERITAGE.ORG.UK/VISIT/PLACES/WALMER-CASTLE-AND-GARDENS

BALMORAL CASTLE

ABERDEENSHIRE, SCOTLAND

The Scottish home of the royal family, Balmoral has been a popular escape for the royals since they acquired the land in 1852 - a present from Prince Albert to Queen Victoria. It offers a glimpse into Victoria and her successors' tastes and ideas of escape and relaxation - though most of the castle is unavailable to visitors, as it is the Queen's private residence.

28

ENTRY FEE

ADULTS £12;
CHILDREN £6

OPENING HOURS

APRIL - AUGUST 10AM-5PM

WEBSITE

BALMORALCASTLE.COM

THE LOWER WARD SHOP

© Getty

Windsor's close proximity to the River Thames and London made it an ideal location for a fortification

Windsor, which depicts the castle's imposing Round Tower.

However, Windsor Castle is not just a monument or a museum, but a fully functioning royal residence that is still generating stories today. Prince Harry and Meghan Markle were married in the chapel, while the Queen holds state banquets and ceremonial functions there throughout the year – as well as staying in the royal apartments regularly. A key thing to look out for is the flag: if the royal standard is flying high above the Round Tower, then the Queen is in residence.

The rooms where much of the ceremonial activity that still goes on can be visited in the Ceremonial Tour through the state rooms, giving an amazing insight into the duties and functions carried out by the Queen.

Some of these functions concern the Order of the Garter. This order, based at Windsor Castle, was established by Edward III in 1348 for 24 trusted and loyal knights, and has continued to the present day – with the Duke of Cambridge becoming the 1,000th knight of the Garter in 2008. Ceremonial rooms dedicated to the order can be found in the castle's state rooms, where investitures and meetings take place. St George's Chapel is also closely linked to the Knights of the Garter, as it is the Order's spiritual home.

The Queen also makes use of some of the most lavish rooms in the castle – George IV's semi-state rooms and drawing rooms that made up his private apartments. These plush yet comfortable rooms – of which the Crimson room and Green room can be seen and visited – are now the setting for the Queen's official entertaining. These rooms and other state rooms were devastated by fire in 1992, and have been exquisitely restored to their former glory. In some cases the spaces have been completely remodelled – a reflection of the castle still working, growing and changing.

These rooms also lead on to a more intimate dining room, which the Queen uses to host 'dine and sleep' events for notable guests drawn from all different corners of society. These royal sleep-overs enable the Queen to bring together an extraordinary and eclectic mix of guests.

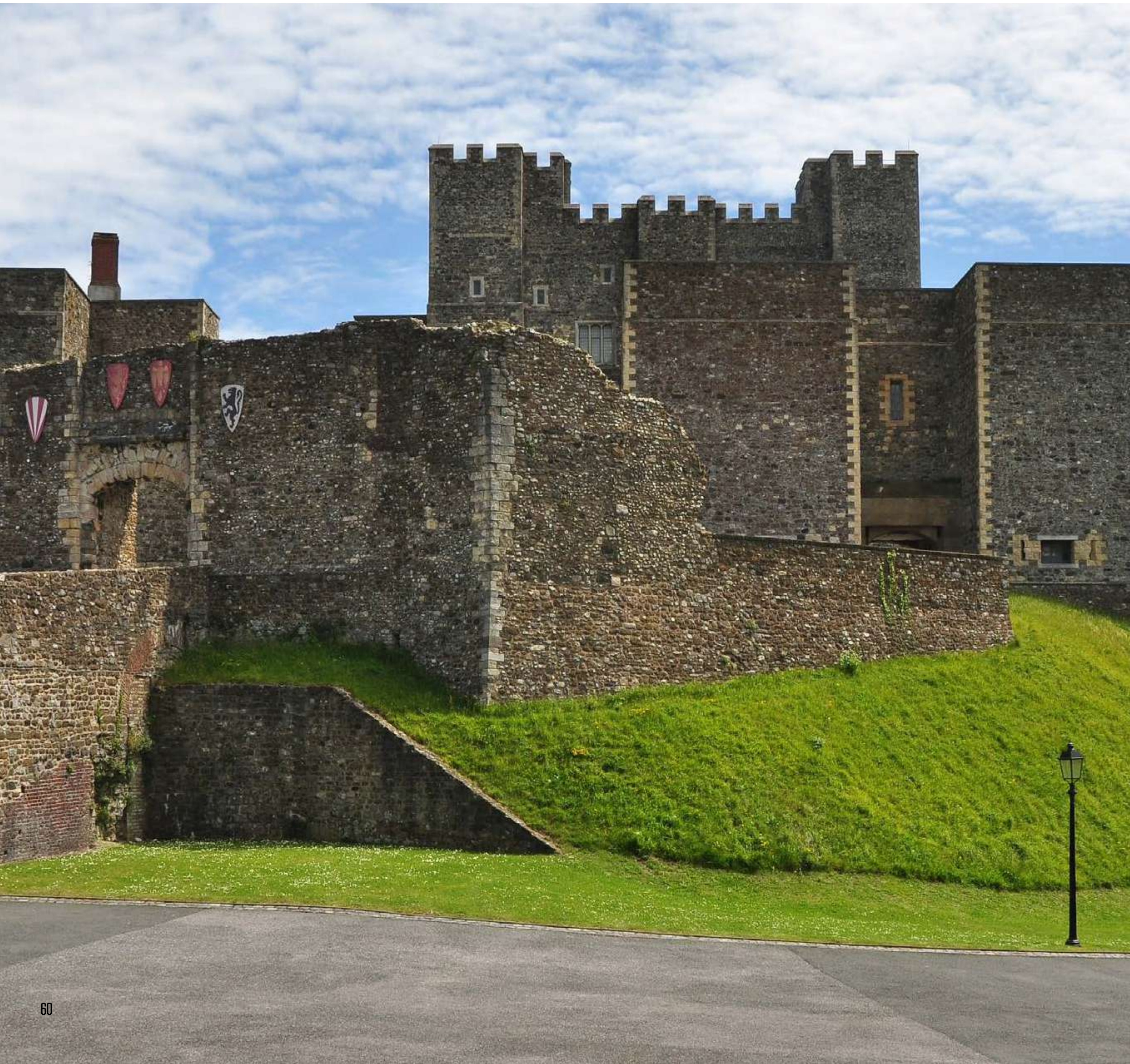
The banquet hall is also still in use for state visits, hosting hundreds of guests simultaneously in grand surroundings, with bandstands positioned high up to shower music down on guests. All the guests are fed with food from the Great Kitchen – the oldest working kitchen in Britain, having been in operation for around 750 years. This is perhaps the perfect reflection of Windsor Castle's role as a key historical site and functioning part of royal life today. The changing of the guard, as the Household Guard change positions, is an interesting ritual that occurs daily, and well worth a watch.

> “IF THE ROYAL STANDARD IS FLYING HIGH, THEN THE QUEEN IS IN RESIDENCE”

NUMBER

29

DOVER
ENGLAND



ENTRY FEE
ADULTS £20.50; CHILDREN £12.50

OPENING HOURS
9.30AM–6PM

WEBSITE
WWW.ENGLISH-HERITAGE.ORG.UK/VISIT/PLACES/DOVER-CASTLE

DOVER CASTLE

For centuries, Dover Castle has been the first line of British defence. Situated on the southeast coast, its cannons pointing across the English Channel to Calais, it has been an imposing complex towering over Dover's harbour. But despite its appearance, England's largest castle didn't fall out of use in the Medieval period – in World War II, it served as an air raid shelter, military hospital and the headquarters for the Dunkirk evacuation. Today it is owned by English Heritage, and it makes the perfect day out no matter what period your interest lies in.

INSIDE THE WORLD'S HAUNTED CASTLES

DISCOVER THE RESTLESS LEGENDS THAT LURK IN DARKENED CORNERS OF THE MOST MENACING CASTLES IN EUROPE

As the Sun sets, its light extinguished by the rising horizon, darkness descends and a looming oblivion pulls all in sight into its oppressive grip. The witching hour is close. Buildings and places that are innocuous by day assume a sinister veil, as dreams and nightmares occupy the minds of those sleeping nearby.

Across Europe, some of the most haunted castles start to come to life, their corridors ringing with the shrieks of their long-dead residents, dungeons still echoing with the moans and groans of its last victims and the gardens are trampled by the memory of demonic animals.

For thousands of ghost hunters around the world, the thrill of catching a glimpse of these ghostly shapes is too thrilling to resist. As the night descends and the castles unveil their dark reality, the spectre-seekers descend, hoping to catch a vital piece of evidence to prove the existence of our paranormal companions.

Some ghost stories concern the famously wronged of history, such as the tale of the Pink Lady of Stirling Castle, rumoured to be the ghost of Mary, Queen of Scots, who was crowned there in 1543. The Green Lady, who also walks Stirling's corridors, is said to have been Mary's maidservant before she moved into the spiritual realm. Haunting isn't the only source of fear in these castles; in the case of Corvin Castle in Romania, it's the rumoured visit of one Vlad the Impaler during his lifetime that brings a chill to visitors. A reconstructed torture chamber adds to the creepy atmosphere.

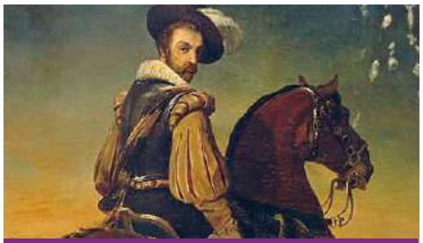
Elsewhere, it is the spectres of long-forgotten maids, footmen and peripheral aristocracy that play a part in some of the most evocative ghost tales. Whether you believe in ghosts or not, the spooks most often stem from legends and historical stories that add colour to any visit to these looming fortresses.

Over the next few pages, discover some of the most notorious haunted castles across Europe, from the demon-stalked Leap Castle in Ireland to Moosham Castle in Austria, better known as the Witches' Castle, after its terrifying role in the Salzburg Witch Trials.

WORDS BY ◆ PHILIPPA GRAFTON

The 17th-century style seen today was commissioned by Charles II de Cossé

CHÂTEAU DE BRISSAC



Charles II de Cossé was given money by Henry IV of France to rebuild the château

The small theatre at the château bears a chilling display

Visitors to the Château de Brissac have claimed to hear dying screams of a murdered couple

30

THE SCREAMS OF CHARLOTTE DE BREZÉ AND HER LOVER HAUNT THE CORRIDORS OF CHÂTEAU DE BRISSAC

BRISSAC-QUINCÉ, FRANCE

The gloriously ornate Château de Brissac has dominated the Loire Valley for centuries. Built initially as a castle in the 11th century, it was rebuilt in the 1400s, and then again in 1611. It is this 17th-century style that we see today, commissioned by the first duke of Brissac, Charles II de Cossé. However, behind this impressive Baroque façade, the hidden secrets of the château's tragic past are kept.

A double murder that took place in the 15th century has haunted residents, with the vision of the Green Lady terrifying visitors. After the château was rebuilt in the 1400s, Jacques de Brezé, the son of the man who had commissioned the redesign, inherited the building. Jacques married a woman named Charlotte, the favoured illegitimate daughter of King Charles VII of France, but their marriage was not a happy one.

Despite having five children, Charlotte's eye wandered, landing upon her husband's huntsman, Pierre de Lavergne, and a frenzied affair began in earnest. According to legend, Jacques walked in on his wife and her lover intertwined. It was the final straw.

Here, records become murky. Some claim that the lovers were murdered on the spot, with over 100 blows from Jacques' sword delivering them to their messy deaths. However, others claim that Jacques waited, murdering the pair separately. In this story, Charlotte was allegedly killed in the château's chapel, brutally strangled by the cuckold.

Hearing of his half-sister's murder, King Louis XI flew into a rage. Jacques was arrested and sentenced to death. But before Jacques could meet his end, Charles VIII, Louis XI's successor, overturned the accusation and Jacques survived.

To this day, the ghost of Charlotte has been spotted roaming the tower in the chapel. Known as the Green Lady, her apparitions have terrified visitors, and it's claimed that half of her face has already rotted away, leaving her as a blackened corpse with empty eye sockets and no nose.

Those who have been (un)fortunate enough to stay in one of the suites that are available to overnight guests have remarked that they've heard dying screams and moans of the murdered couple along the corridors in the early hours of the morning.

ENTRY FEE
ADULTS €10; CHILDREN €4.50

OPENING HOURS
TIMES CHANGE DURING THE YEAR – CHECK WEBSITE

WEBSITE
WWW.CHATEAU-BRISSAC.FR/?LANG=EN

31

CORVIN CASTLE

STEP INSIDE THE CASTLE WHERE ONE OF THE MOST NOTORIOUS PRINCES OF HISTORY WAS HELD PRISONER

HUNEDOARA, ROMANIA

ENTRY FEE
ADULTS 30 LEI; STUDENTS 7 LEI

OPENING HOURS
MONDAY 12-5PM; TUESDAY - SUNDAY 9AM-5PM

WEBSITE
WWW.CASTELULCORVINILOR.RO/?LANG=EN

The truth about the history of Translyvania's Corvin Castle can be hard to pin down. Steeped in creepy lore and lurching legend, perhaps its most famous connection is to Vlad the Impaler, Romania's ruthless 15th-century prince of Wallachia. The prince was known for his trademark move, impaling his enemies on stakes, which was perfected while pursuing control of Wallachia. The region had been wrested from his father by nobles who later assassinated him. Meanwhile, Vlad and his younger brother were away at the court of Ottoman Sultan Murad II, as collateral to their father's support for Ottoman policies.

While many will think of Bran Castle as the home of the infamous Vlad the Impaler, Corvin Castle's link to the inspiration for Dracula is also difficult to verify. The popular story goes that Vlad, imprisoned in the castle's dungeon for years, was driven insane there and became darker in his thoughts than ever before. It has never been proven, however, that the prince was held prisoner there, but it is thought that if he were, it was only for a few months. Either way, the dungeon in which Vlad would have been held in is open for visitors.

The castle holds plenty of spooks, from a torture chamber to a deep well with a chilling legend of its own. Three Turkish men imprisoned at the castle built the well, and the castle's owner told them that if they struck water, they would be freed. They did, and while the owner had his well, he reneged and didn't grant them freedom. One of them reportedly wrote the message: "You now have water, but you don't have a heart" on the side of the well wall.

MOOSHAM CASTLE

THE WITCHES' CASTLE WAS AT THE HEART OF ONE OF THE MOST BRUTAL AND BLOODY TRIALS IN HISTORY

UNTERNBERG, AUSTRIA

32

With a history that stems all the way back to the 12th century, it's no surprise that Moosham Castle has a past that would send shivers down any spine.

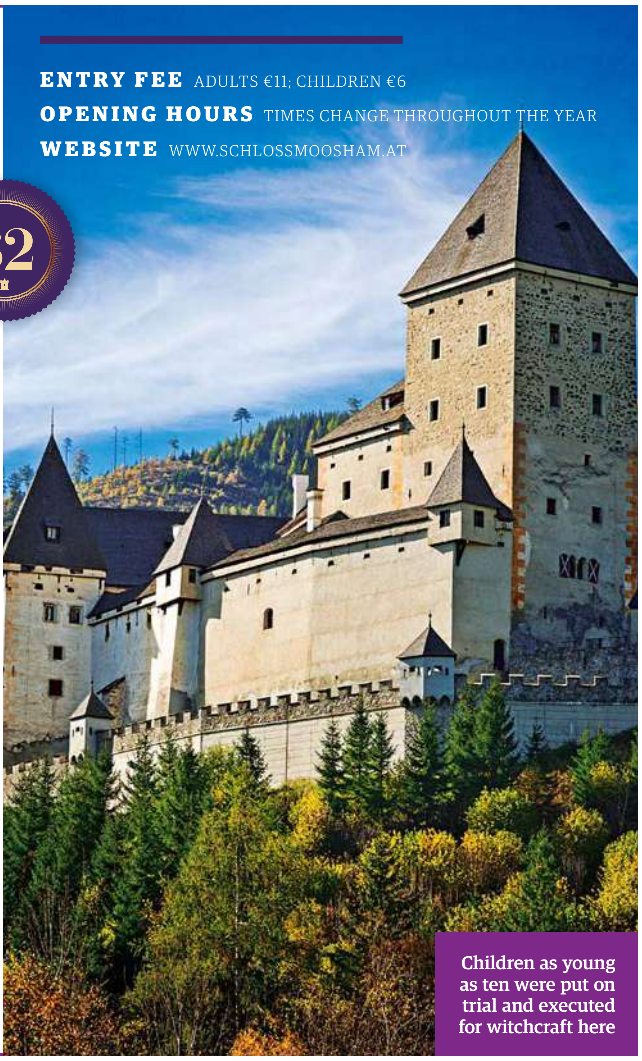
Popularly known as the Witches' Castle, Moosham was home to some of the darkest moments in Austrian history. Between 1675 and 1690, its spooky walls were at the heart of the Salzburg Witch Trials, where those accused of witchcraft were tried, tortured and condemned. Over the 15 years of trials, more than 130 people were condemned to death, while countless more suffered horrific torture, brutality and abuse at the hands of their captors.

Curiously, most of the people tried and accused of witchcraft were men, and the accusers weren't particular about who their accusations fell upon - those who were executed varied from ten years old all the way up to 80. Arguably those who weren't executed faced a worse fate than those who were killed. Thousands were tortured, each branded with a poker-hot iron that scarred them for life. Until their dying day, they were marked as a witch. Other torture methods involved chopping off the hands of those accused. The lucky ones would be those that were burned at the stake - whether alive or already dead from the cruelty that was inflicted upon them.

Most of those accused of witchcraft were beggars, paupers and the homeless. One particular beggar, a 12-year-old boy, became known as Wizard Jackl. The government fiercely hunted him after he disappeared following the execution of his mother in 1675. Despite hearing rumours of the boy's death two years later, his friends on the streets were rounded up under the accusation that they'd been taught black magic by their long-gone friend. Under torture, they told tales of Jackl's power and barbarity, claiming he could turn invisible, eventually convincing the government that they'd rather not find the boy.

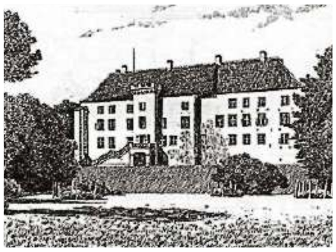
Horrifically, Moosham's connection to the Salzburg Witch Trials isn't the only mystical experience. In the 19th century, hundreds of deer and cattle were found dead all around the castle. Naturally many residents leapt to the conclusion that werewolves were responsible for their deaths, and several castle residents were tried and executed under the pretence that they were werewolves.

To this day, the castle is host to several paranormal presences. Those who have visited the castle claim to have felt someone breathing on them, while others claim to have been touched by some invisible being. More frequently, bangs, footsteps and apparitions have been reported.



ENTRY FEE ADULTS €11; CHILDREN €6
OPENING HOURS TIMES CHANGE THROUGHOUT THE YEAR
WEBSITE WWW.SCHLOSSMOOSHAM.AT

Children as young as ten were put on trial and executed for witchcraft here



The castle was used as a prison for noble and high-ranking criminals

Today, visitors can dine in the atmospheric castle

The ghost of James Hepburn, 4th Earl of Bothwell and third husband of Mary, Queen of Scots, is said to roam the castle

DRAGSHOLM CASTLE

33

ONE OF DENMARK'S OLDEST CASTLES IS HOME TO MORE THAN 100 GHOSTS

HØRVE, DENMARK

Built in about 1215 by the bishop of Rosilde, Dragsholm Castle's history is as rich and interesting as it is morbid. During the Middle Ages, it was overhauled and thoroughly fortified, making it the strongest fortification at the time. As a testament to its strength, it stood resolute against the fiercely destructive armies of Christoffer, Count of Oldenburg, during the Count's Feud of 1534-36.

After the Reformation that followed, Dragsholm Castle fell into the hands of the state, where it was transformed into a prison for noble and high-ranking prisoners. Here, each prisoner received a cell built especially for them, while cells in the northeast tower were equipped with toilets and windows.

Perhaps the most infamous prisoner of Dragsholm Castle was James Hepburn, 4th Earl of Boswell, perhaps best known for being the third husband of Mary, Queen of Scots. Caught in Norway in 1573, the earl found himself transported to Dragsholm on the order of King Frederik II of Denmark. Here, he was tied to a pillar and was provided with only enough food and water to keep him alive. It's alleged that he went insane, dying almost five years after he was captured. His ghost is still said to haunt the castle, with witnesses claiming to have seen the disgraced earl riding into the courtyard on his horse and carriage, the sound of the horse's hooves audible across the castle.

As well as James Hepburn, there are apparently more than 99 other ghosts that frequent the castle's hallways. The Mad Squire, a noble-born Dane who died at Dragsholm, has been heard moaning from the dungeons, while there are two ladies who haunt the corridors, one a disgraced daughter of a noble, the other a grateful worker. The Grey Lady, who had worked in the castle for years, went to work one day complaining of toothache. Her master had given her some relief for the pain, but tragically the woman died. Yet thankful for the help her master had offered her, she stuck around.

The White Lady, however, met her maker after disgracing her father. Calina Bovles, the daughter of a noble, had fallen in love with a mere commoner and had become pregnant with his child. As evidence of her liaison grew, her father realised the atrocity that she had committed and locked her in a room until she died. Incidentally, during renovations, the skeleton of a woman wearing a white dress was uncovered in the 20th century.

ENTRY FEE
PRICES VARY DEPENDING ON GROUP SIZES

OPENING HOURS
FOR GUIDED TOUR TIMES, CHECK WEBSITE

WEBSITE
WWW.EN.DRAGSHOLM-SLOT.DK

ELTZ CASTLE

34

A GHOST PACES THE CASTLE GROUNDS, A DEFENDER OF HER HOME

WIERSCHEM, GERMANY

Still owned today by the same family that built it, the 12th-century castle was once home to Agnes Eltz. A daughter among many sons, she grew up around the 16th century, pretending to be a warrior with her brothers instead of a princess. But like may girls of her age and status, Agnes was destined for an arranged marriage from a young age. Her parents' choice was the knight of Braunsberg, but the young girl dismissed him as boring and ignored him.

One day, infuriated by her lack of interest, the knight grabbed Agnes and forced himself upon her. Outraged, Agnes pushed him away and slapped him about the face – a great embarrassment for her family. The knight's patience had worn thin, and he stormed out the castle, vowing revenge.

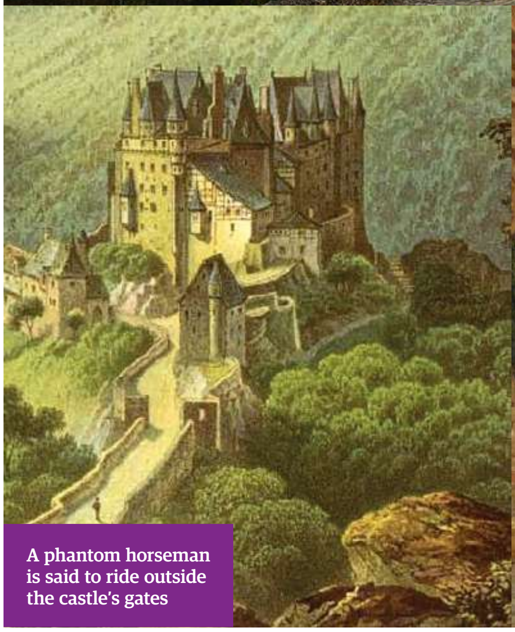
For months, the Eltz family lived in fear of an attack – but it didn't come. Lulled into a sense of security, they resumed their usual lives, but the knight hadn't forgotten. One day, when the Eltz men went out hunting, Braunsberg and his soldiers stormed the castle, attacking anyone in sight. Agnes leapt into action, but Braunsberg fought back, dealing her a fatal blow to the chest. It was only after the battle that the knight realised he'd killed was his own betrothed. As the ghost of Agnes defends her castle, people have reported a phantom horseman riding outside the castle gates – the apparition of the knight of Braunsberg – seeking forgiveness.

ENTRY FEE ADULTS €10; CHILDREN €6.50

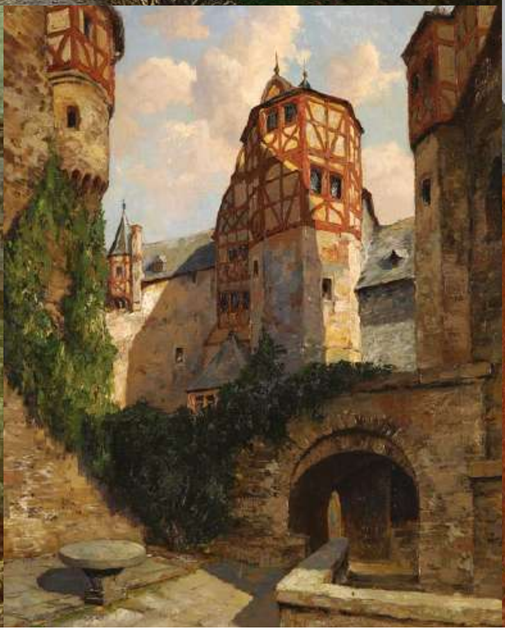
OPENING HOURS 9AM-5.30PM

WEBSITE WWW.BURG-ELTZ.DE/EN

The ghost of Agnes patrols the castle, protecting it from further attack



A phantom horseman is said to ride outside the castle's gates



The castle has remained home to the Eltz family for 33 generations

LEAP CASTLE

35

A FAMILY FEUD GONE WRONG LEFT LEAP CASTLE AS THE MOST HAUNTED SITE IN IRELAND

ROSCREA, IRELAND

Claimed to be the most haunted site in all of Ireland, Leap Castle hides a dark and treacherous past. Allegedly built on a druid initiation site, which was chosen for being the crossing of two Ley lines, it is claimed that the barrier between the physical and spiritual realms are particularly thin here, resulting in paranormal activity that exaggerated the aura - both good and bad.

Even before it was built, the castle was bathed in blood, condemning the site to negative paranormal activity. Originally built by the O'Bannon clan in the 13th century, the family was in the midst of a dilemma - two brothers contested each other's claim as chieftain. To solve the issue, both brothers jumped into a rocky gorge, the survivor taking the title.

Merely 200 years later, the earl of Kildare had tried to seize the castle several times, the last attempt succeeding in destroying part of it. The castle soon landed in the lap of the O'Carroll clan. The O'Carrolls, too, were engaged in a serious sibling rivalry. Following the death of the chieftain, Mulrooney O'Carroll, in 1532, the two sons had feuded over the right to lead. One a warrior, the other a priest, both claimed it was their right. One day, as the priest held mass for some family, his brother stormed in. Outraged that the priest had started the mass before all the family had arrived, he leapt towards the priest and plunged his sword straight through his heart. The priest collapsed over his altar, soaking it in his blood. Still to this day, his ghost has often been seen around the chapel.

It's not just the priest whose spirit remains at Leap Castle; the ghosts of two young girls have been spotted at the site. Usually seen playing together, others have reported witnessing one of the girls falling from the battlements, while the other has been seen dragging a deformed leg behind her. These sisters, Emily and Charlotte, were thought to have lived there in the 1600s.

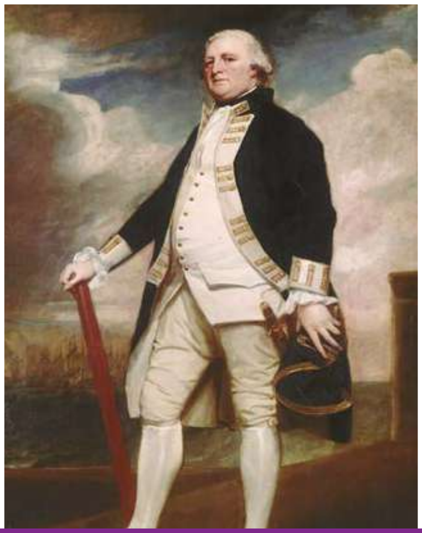
More inexplicable, perhaps, is the hybrid phantom that roams the grounds. Apparently as big as a sheep, but with the face of a human, this demon emits the foul stench of rotting flesh. If that's not bad enough, in place of eyes are empty, black pools. Nobody can explain its terrifying presence, but it has since been named the Elemental, and some theories claim that the spirit calls back to the days of the druids. Thankfully it's said that the Elemental doesn't appear unless you provoke it.

Even today, the castle's current owner, Sean Ryan, reports curious goings on. Currently undergoing renovations, Sean has reported that ladders have been pushed from walls, as well as other unexplained accidents that have resulted in workers' broken limbs.

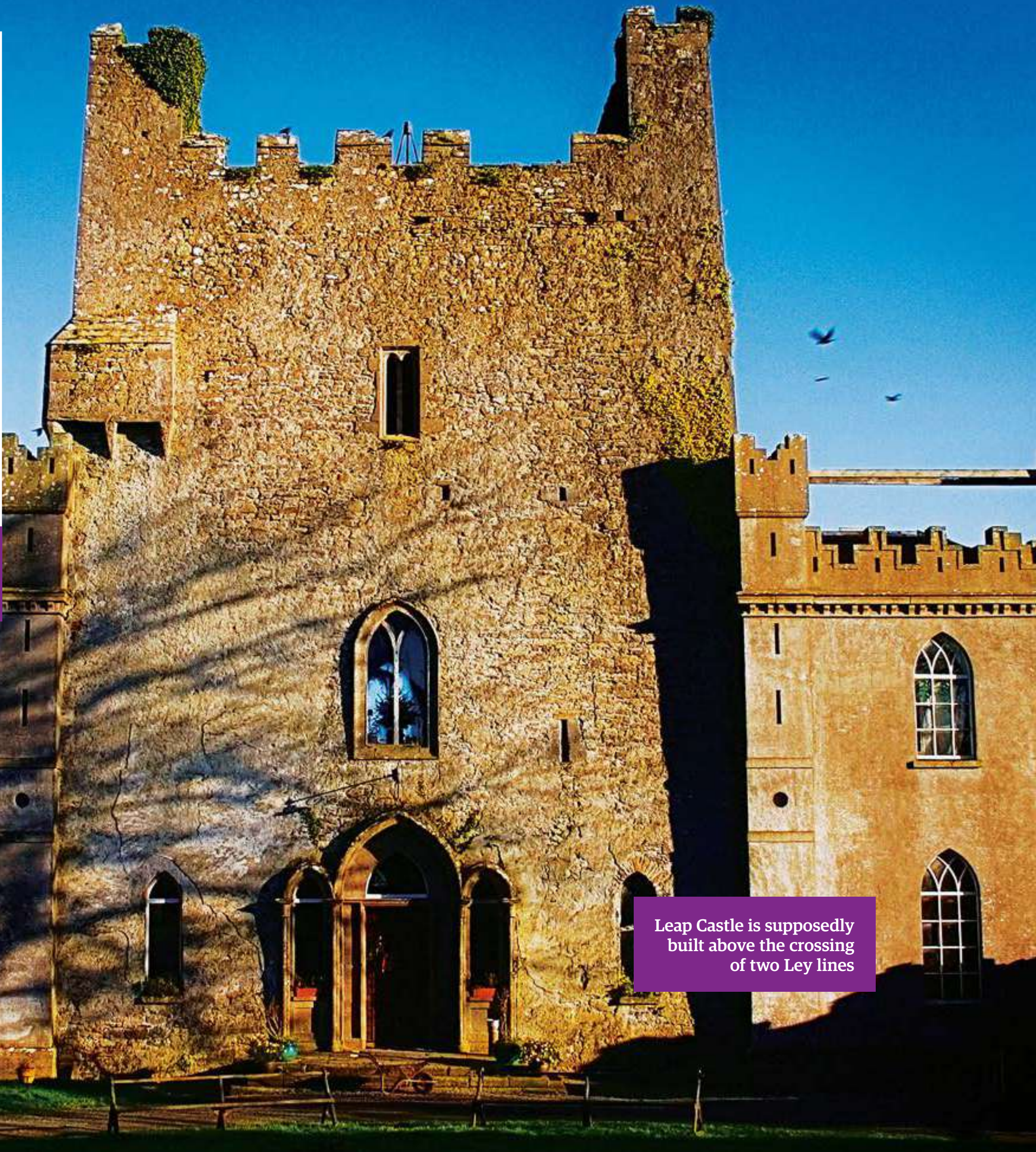
ENTRY FEE & OPENING HOURS

FOLLOW CONTACT DETAILS ON WEBSITE

WEBSITE WWW.LEAPCASTLE.NET



Vice Admiral George Darby, whose family experienced most of the reported paranormal activities at the castle



Leap Castle is supposedly built above the crossing of two Ley lines

The curious legends of the castle attracted the occultist experiments of the Nazis

A chapel dedicated to Archangel Michael is built over the 'gateway to hell'

The chapel walls, adorned with many frescoes

HOUSKA CASTLE

36

BUILT IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE, WITH NO ACCESS TO WATER AND SEEMINGLY NO PURPOSE, HOUSKA CASTLE HIDES A VERY SINISTER SECRET

DOKSY, CZECHIA

About 50 kilometres away from Prague stands a building that seemingly serves absolutely no purpose. Houska Castle was built in the 14th century by the Bohemian ruler Ottokar II and it has changed hands several times since then, enjoying a Renaissance redesign in the late 16th century, before falling into disrepair in the 18th century. By the 20th century, the curious legend of Houska Castle had attracted the attention of one particular group of people: the Nazis.

Unlike other fortresses of the period, it wasn't meant to house the king. The castle wasn't near any trading route and there was no access to water. Defences were built inside the castle rather than outside - instead of keeping people out, it seemed like the castle was meant to trap something else in.

According to lore, this apparently pointless construction was, in fact, built over the gates of hell. A bottomless hole had existed at Houska for centuries, a gateway for demons and evil beings to enter Earth and terrorise people. The area has long been avoided by locals, and even to this day the castle is given a wide berth, with only the inquisitive daring to set foot on the property.

Above this fateful hole stands the chapel, dedicated to none other than the leader of God's army, Archangel Michael. The chapel itself is remarkable for more than just its guarding presence. Frescoes decorate the walls - but their gory tales give an insight into what lurks below, with left-handed demons clawing their way out of the scenes.

However, before the chapel's construction, the hole was involved in some sinister experiments. Attempts were made to fill it with rocks, but no matter how many rocks were thrown in, it never seemed to fill. It's alleged that one duke was keen to get to the bottom of the hole's mystery, and so he summoned prisoners who had been condemned to death and offered them a full pardon if they agreed to be lowered into the hole. Many agreed, expecting to escape with their lives. They were mistaken. There was silence as one man was lowered down. Moments later, his uncontrollable screams echoed up from the depths of the hole. As he was hauled back out, they discovered his hair had turned white and he'd aged several decades. They never found out what was in the hole - it drove the prisoner to madness, and he died days later.

Houska Castle is home to many more secrets than the gates of hell, however. Many visitors claim to have experienced some supernatural encounters, from the ghost of a woman that stalks the corridors, to curious animal-like presences.

It's these stories and supernatural sightings that struck a chord with the Nazis in the 20th century. From 1939 to 1945, Houska Castle was home to occult experiments, but records were destroyed and it's not known what happened here - we'll probably never know. However, several skeletons of Nazi officers were discovered during renovations. Their own comrades had executed them.

ENTRY FEE

ADULTS 100 KČ; CONCESSIONS 70 KČ

OPENING HOURS

TIMES VARY - CHECK WEBSITE

WEBSITE

WWW.HRADHOUSKA.CZ

MORITZBURG CASTLE

A DECADENT HUNTING RETREAT TURNED FAIRY-TALE PALACE, THIS MAGNIFICENT RESIDENCE TOWERS ABOVE ITS WOODLAND SURROUNDS

MORTIZBURG
GERMANY

NUMBER

37

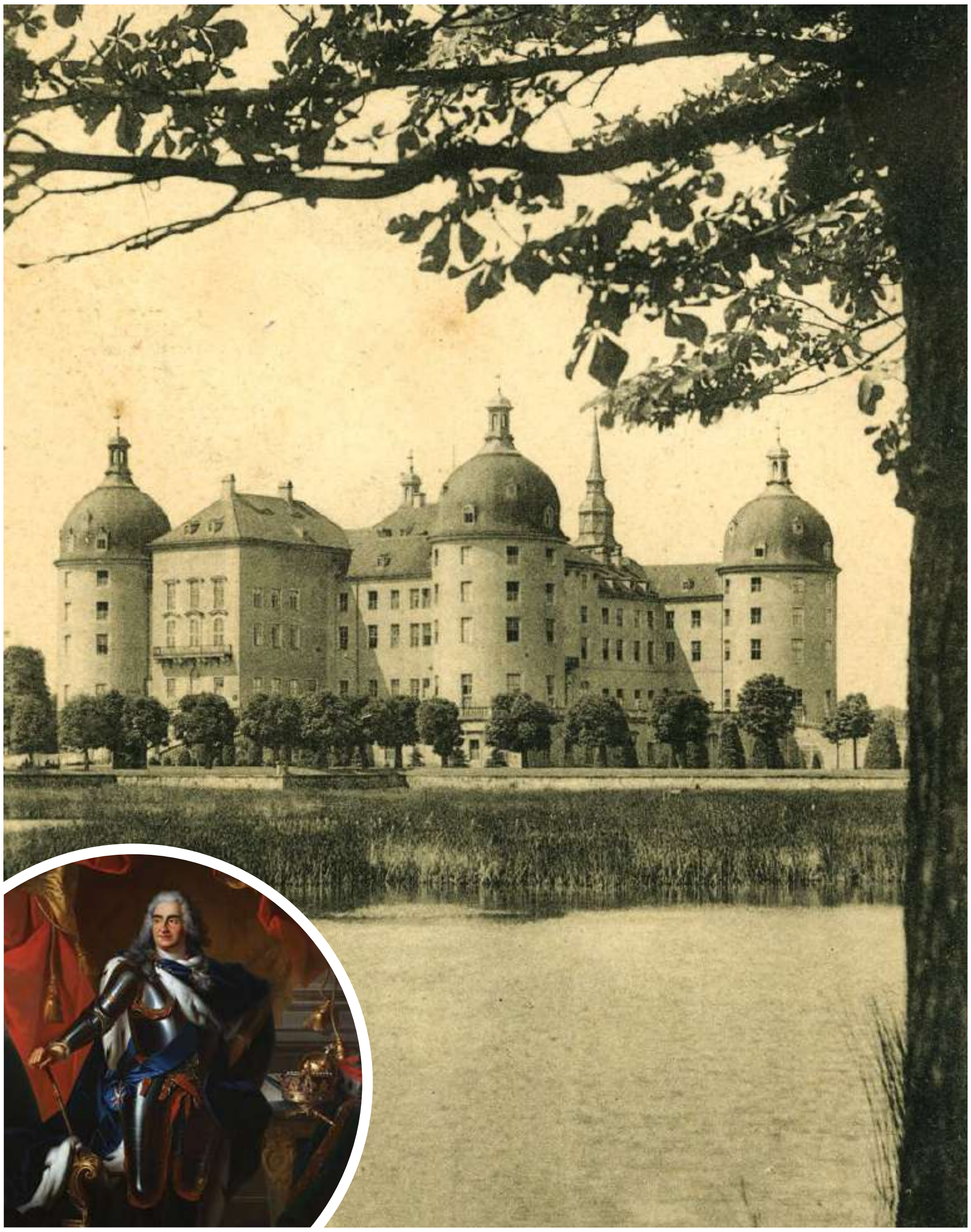
WORDS BY ◆ ROSS HAMILTON

When Maurice, Duke of Saxony, selected the verdant Friedewald outside Dresden as the ideal place for a hunting lodge, the state was an integral member of the Holy Roman Empire. By the time the castle we see today was vacated by its last royal resident, the Red Army was beginning its incursion into Germany at the close of World War II.

The history of Moritzburg Castle, named for its founder, spans centuries, but the magnificence of the structure and the beauty of its natural surroundings have seen it remain a focal point. Constructed during the 1540s, Maurice's Renaissance-style retreat was expanded and developed by numerous Saxon electors, before Frederick Augustus I (known as Augustus the Strong) decided a more lavish castle was necessary.

Augustus had his way. The striking yellow and white palace he had built on the site dominates its surroundings, its four domed towers rising from the midst of a pristine lake. But despite its Baroque opulence, Moritzburg retains the feel of an oasis in the middle of an untamed wilderness, situated as it is on the fringes of the (now considerably diminished) forest. A grand and open pathway leads north through its gardens, but is soon swallowed by tangled greenery – a call to the hunt that drew nobles from all over central Europe to Moritzburg during its heyday.

This hunting legacy is embedded in Moritzburg, both inside and out. Carved stags' heads adorn the northern and southern facades of the castle, and its cavernous banqueting halls echo with the game-laden feasts of Saxon royalty. A monument that provides a tangible link through the most decadent and troubled eras of Saxony's history, Moritzburg today embodies the enduring appeal of an era of extravagance that has long since passed.



A 1912 photograph of the castle surrounded by its lake

A 19th-century copy of Frederick Augustus of Poland and Saxony, originally created in 1718 by Louis de Silvestre

ENTRY FEE

ADULTS €8; CHILDREN €1

OPENING HOURS

10AM – 5PM

WEBSITE

WWW.SCHLOSS-MORITZBURG.DE/EN

THE LITTLE PHEASANT CASTLE

A MORE MODEST PALACE SITS WITHIN ITS LARGER SIBLING'S GROUNDS

Where do royals go when they need to retreat from their country retreat? Moritzburg offers a solution, with its Little Pheasant Castle occupying an idyllic spot in the grounds to the east of the main schloss. The site was long home to Moritzburg's pheasantry (hence its name), where birds were reared both to provide meat for the castle's occupants and to be released into the surrounding woodland in order to sustain the game population.

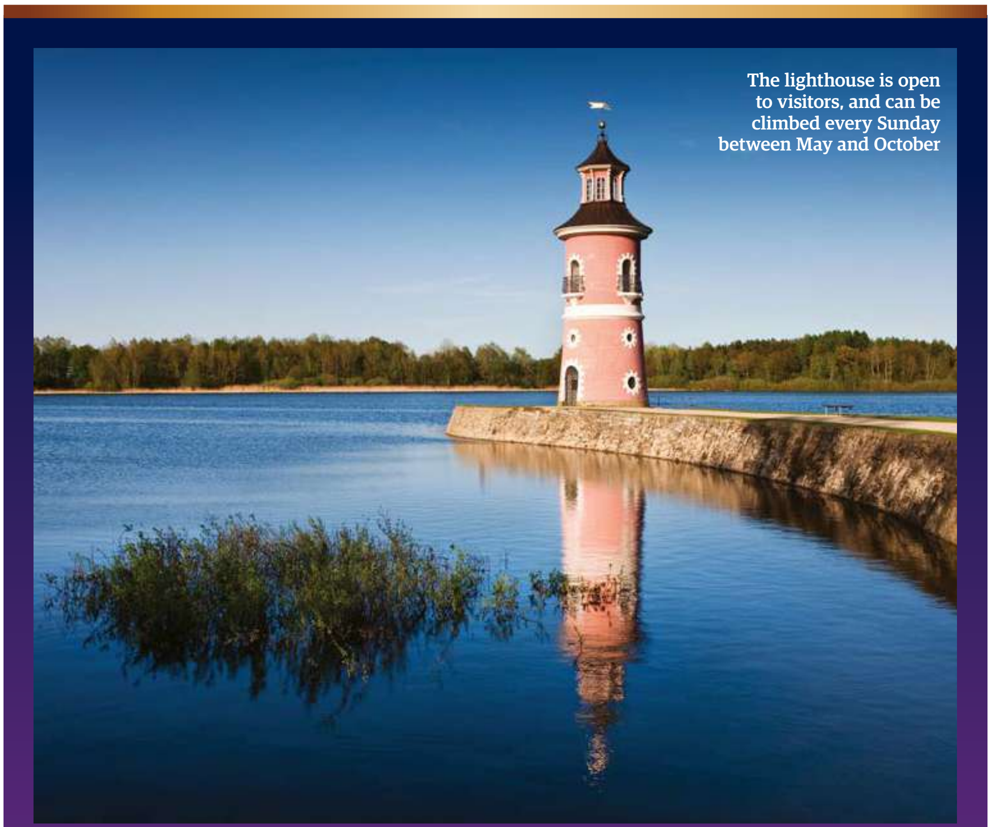
The charming palace visible today was built in the 1770s under the direction of architect Johann Daniel Schade of Dresden, and fuses classic Baroque elements with a cleaner Rococo style. True to its heritage, the complex featured aviaries and continued to house exotic birds well after the pheasant breeding ceased around 1815. Though it later fell out of favour somewhat during the 20th century, a restoration, completed in 2007, has helped to return the castle to its former glory.

TAMED PARK AND WILD FOREST

THE NATURAL AND MAN-MADE COLLIDE IN THE CASTLE'S GROUNDS

Moritzburg and its surroundings juxtapose the refined and the unruly; the constructed and the natural; order and chaos. The lake and island on which the schloss sits are man-made, but the woodland surrounding it has, for the most part, been kept deliberately wild throughout the years, due to the importance of hunting to Moritzburg and its generations of royal inhabitants. Venture into the surrounding woods, however, and you will find an overgrown system of alleys running through them, each eventually meeting at the ruined glade house at their centre.

Numerous attempts have been made to carve permanent gardens out of the dense forest north of the castle, with the first efforts dating back to August the Strong in the early 18th century. But, to date, no garden project has ever been fully completed, though work continues on the existing U-shaped lawn layout.



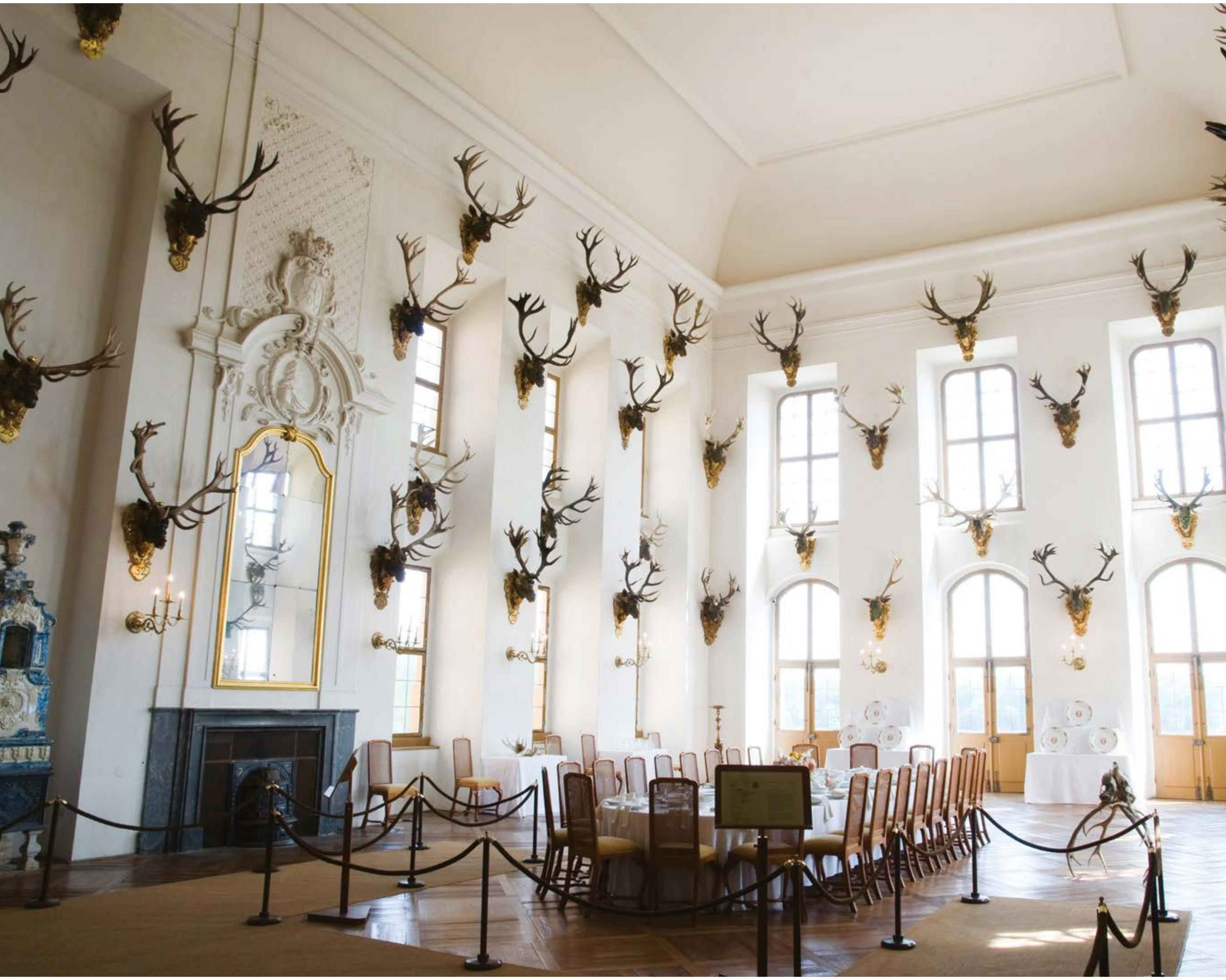
The lighthouse is open to visitors, and can be climbed every Sunday between May and October

A LANDLOCKED LIGHTHOUSE

THIS VANITY STRUCTURE SHINES OUT OVER MORITZBURG'S NEARBY LAKE

Moritzburg is hardly the first place you'd expect to see a lighthouse, given that it's roughly 370 kilometres from the nearest coastline. But this minor geographical inconvenience didn't stop a fully working structure from being erected in 1776 during the reign of Elector Frederick Augustus III (later King Frederick Augustus I). The striking lighthouse is conspicuous thanks to its fetching pink brickwork, and stands on the end of the miniature jetty that sweeps out into the Great Lake.

Much like the lake itself (it's referred to as a teich, or pond, in German), the lighthouse and mock harbour that has been constructed around it are scaled-down versions of the real thing, used to stage small but extravagant re-creations of naval battles for the residents of the town of Moritzburg. Boats would be sent forth armed with miniature cannons shooting fireworks – for the Electors of Saxony, accuracy was considered less important than spectacle.

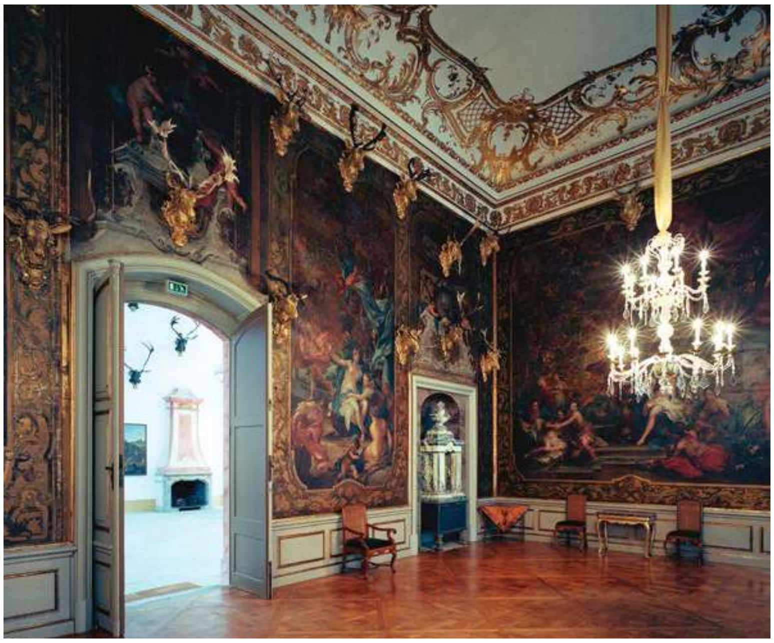


The mounted trophies adorn the walls of Moritzburg's dining room

DINING ROOM

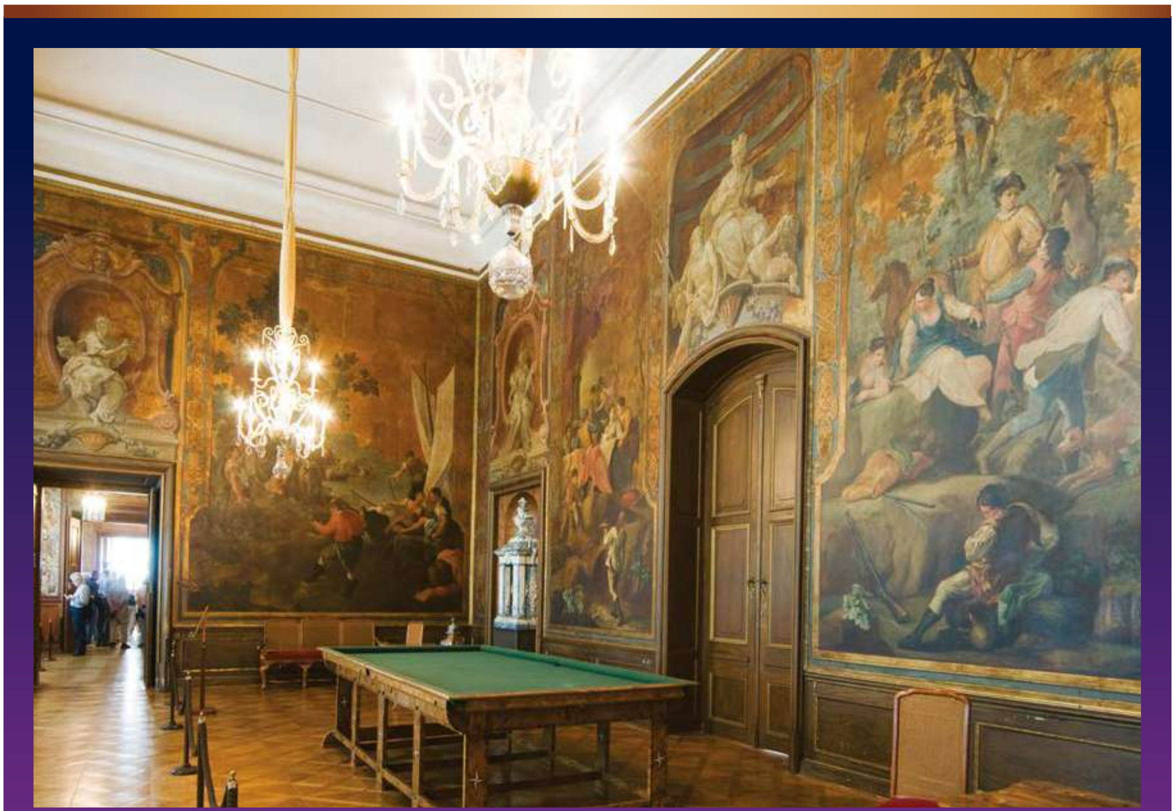
Icons of the hunt are everywhere in Moritzburg, but nowhere more so than in the castle's spectacular showpiece room. Though it's simply known as the dining room, the magnificent banquet hall is so much more. It embodies the spirit of the palace as conceived by Augustus the Strong – a lavish Baroque take on the Temple of Artemis, itself a monument to the Greek goddess of the hunt.

The emphasis in Moritzburg was always on sport and revelry, offering an escape from the business of politics that took place in nearby Dresden, and here the castle's royal inhabitants and their noble guests would feast, drink and share their tales from the day's hunt. Looking down on the site of centuries of revelry is the dining room's silent menagerie. A contorted forest of more than 70 sets of antlers covers the hall's walls – a mounted herd frequently cited as the world's most important trophy collection. The effect is truly awesome, though more than a little macabre. As impressive as the collection is, however, few of the specimens were actually acquired at Moritzburg. Instead, they were largely purchased by Augustus the Strong, or donated as gifts by the palace's visiting nobility, with the prime asset being a towering set of antlers belonging to the long-extinct giant red deer. Irrespective of their origin, however, the dining room's inhabitants remain a potent reminder of the elector's wealth and prosperity.



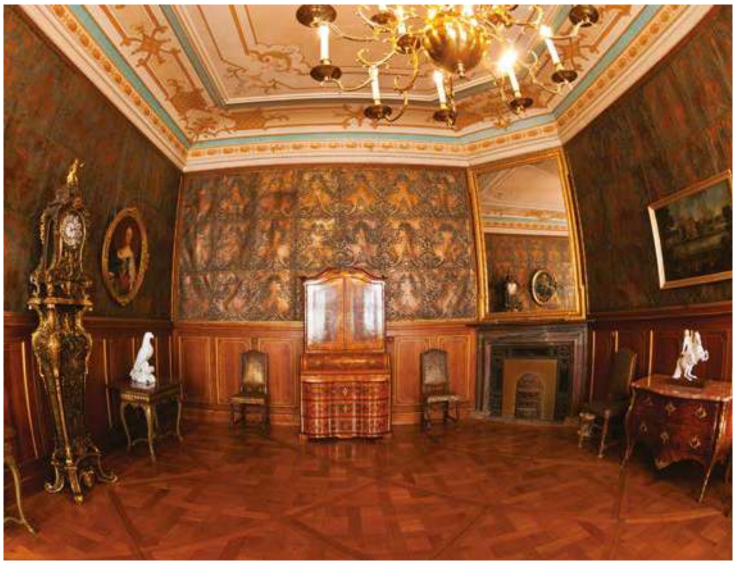
HALL OF MONSTROSITIES

Though it maintains the grandiloquent air of many of the castle's other rooms, Moritzburg's Monströsensaal also acts as its house of horrors. The 'Hall of Monstrosities' features lofty ceilings and towering painted wall coverings that exquisitely depict mythological scenes, but once again the focus here is on the trophies. Though less numerous than the dining room, numbering a mere 39, the antlers here were selected because they were unusual, misshapen – monstrous even. The pride of the display is an astonishing set of 66-point red deer antlers, belonging to an animal allegedly felled by Elector Frederick III of Brandenburg in the late 17th century. Frederick would later become the first king in Prussia, but it's unlikely that he ever collected another trophy that was quite as remarkable.



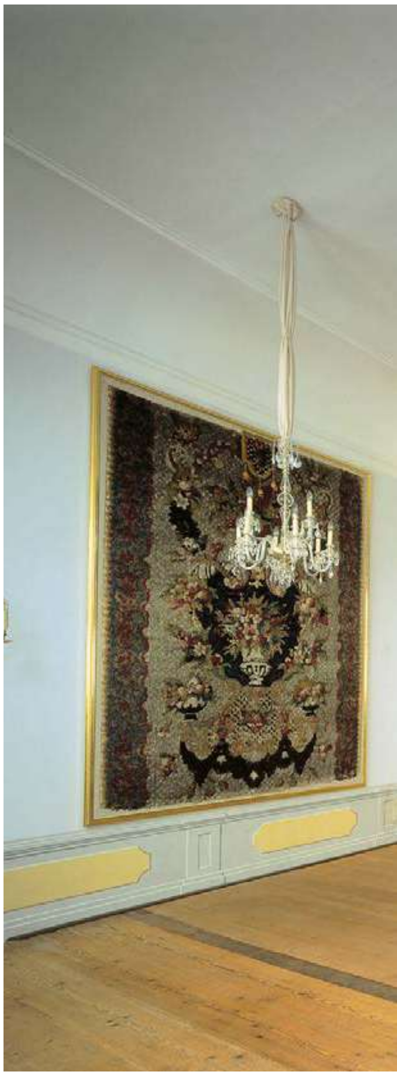
BILLIARDS ROOM

After a long day hunting, or perhaps on afternoons when the weather wasn't amenable, the Billiards Room provided yet another luxurious leisure spot for the inhabitants of Moritzburg to pass the time. Cue sports had been a popular distraction for the European nobility since the 16th century, but while the room received its rather unassuming name from the table at its centre, it's arguably the least arresting feature of this fabulous hall. Instead, the eyes are instantly drawn to the imposing paintings that dominate the walls. Commissioned specifically for the room by Augustus the Strong, the magnificent works on sheets of gilded leather are the work of his French court painter, Louis de Silvestre.

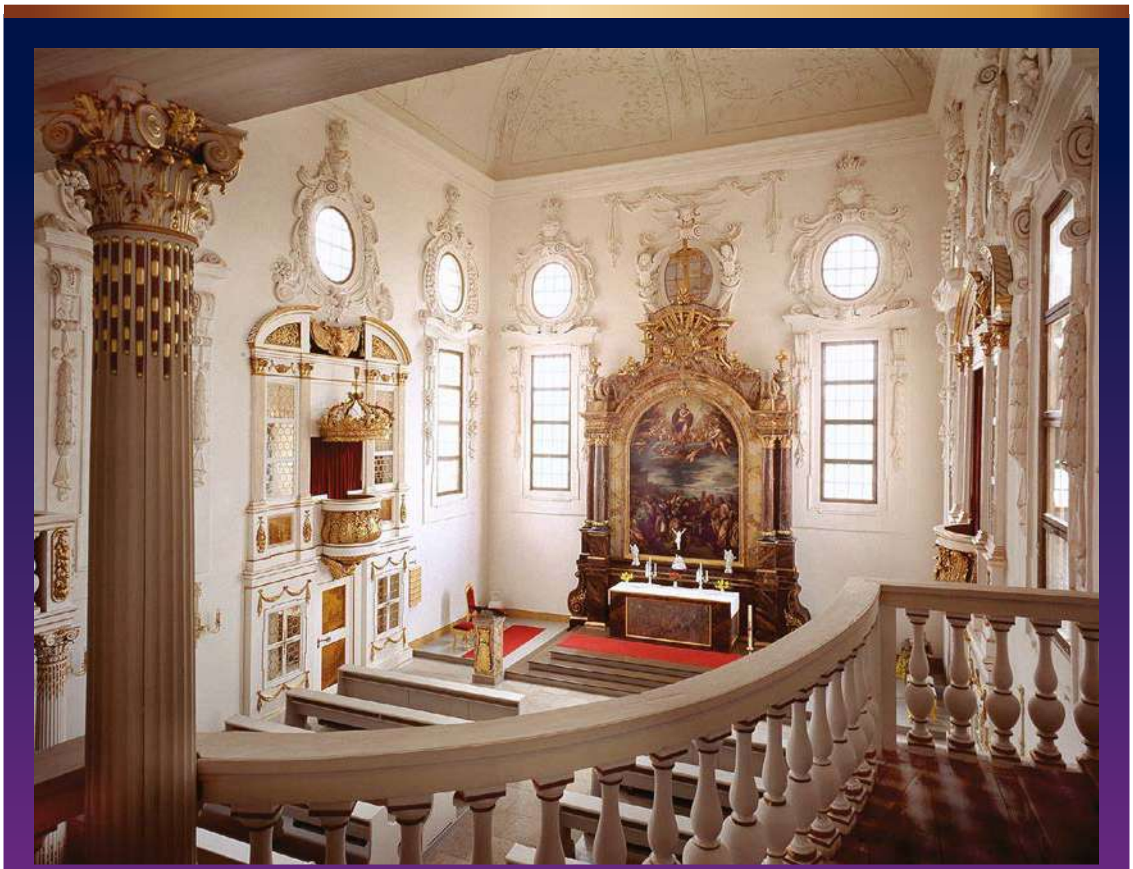


ELECTOR'S ROOMS

A pair of Moritzburg's more intimate rooms are named for the title of their builder, a convention that has remained long after Saxony's evolution from electorate to kingdom, and now free state within the nation of Germany. Ornately decorated but somehow understated, both rooms feature dark wood panelling and the palace's signature leather wall coverings, though the mythical paintings of Louis de Silvestre are replaced here with more abstract floral patterning. Portraits of the Saxon electors look out from the edges of each room, while they both contain some sublime examples of lacquered furniture, from an extravagantly decorated bureau to a pair of elaborately gilded freestanding clocks.

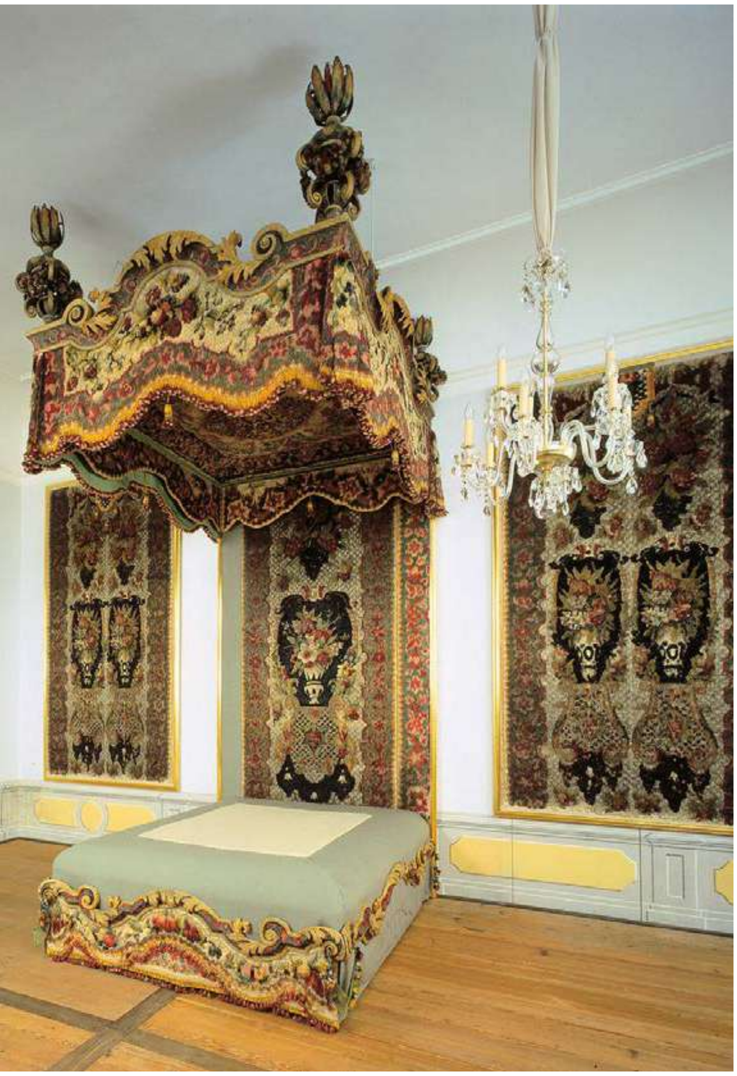


It's the bed that gives this room its name, as its canopy and curtains are woven from more than 1 million feathers



CASTLE CHAPEL

A vision of fine white columns and stucco with gilded accents, Moritzburg's chapel is a breathtaking place of worship. Originally built in 1661 on the orders of the Lutheran Elector John George II, it underwent a shift to Catholicism at the close of the 17th century during the rule of Augustus the Strong. Augustus' conversion stemmed less from a religious awakening - Saxony as a whole had until then been a bastion of European Protestantism - and more from his desire for a royal title. As a Catholic, he became eligible to ascend to the Polish throne, and was crowned King Augustus II in 1697. In his memory, the chapel remained a Catholic outpost in a Protestant state, and it continues to hold regular services to this day.



THE FEATHER ROOM

Schloss Moritzburg is filled with priceless artefacts, from the hunting trophies that adorn its walls to the stunning works of porcelain dotted throughout its halls. But the castle's pièce de résistance can be found in one of its many bedrooms.

The Federzimmer, or Feather Room, is sparsely decorated in comparison to some of Moritzburg's more opulent chambers, but its one conspicuous feature is the magnificent bed from which the room has obtained its name. With a canopy and curtains woven from more than 1 million feathers - a mixture of peacock, pheasant and duck - the Feather Room's bed is an unparalleled work of superlative craftsmanship.

Painstakingly restored for public viewing and reopened in 2003, the bed's vividly realised tapestries are resplendent with floral patterns and rich hues of red, orange and green. A favourite furnishing of Augustus the Strong, the elector had its curtains removed and repurposed as wall hangings, to stunning effect.

There is some dispute as to the circumstances of the bed's creation, in addition to varying accounts of how it came to be in Augustus' possession - one such tale asserts that it was a gift from the king of Spain following the elector's victory in a bullfight. What is known is that when Augustus originally acquired the bed, he had it moved to his recently completed Japanese Palace in Dresden. It finally made its permanent home in Moritzburg in 1830, during the reign of Anthony of Saxony.

ELSEWHERE IN SAXONY

UNCOVER MORE CASTLES NEAR MORITZBURG

© DJHLvbSachsen

COLDITZ CASTLE

With over 1,000 years of history contained within its walls, Colditz is perhaps most famous for its time as a military prison in World War II. Well worth a visit no matter which part of its past you're interested in, a guided tour starts at just €7.50.

© Mia

MEISSEN ALBRECHTSBURG CASTLE

Thought to be the oldest palace building in Germany, this late-Gothic masterpiece in the Elbe River valley is as stunning inside as it is out. A combined ticket will also take you to Meissen Cathedral.

© Stefan Melzig

KÖNIGSTEIN FORTRESS

A mix of Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque architecture, this castle boasts 2.2 kilometres of walls to walk around and a breathtaking view of the Saxon countryside. It's one of the most visited sites in Germany, and it's easy to see why.

© Hedwig Storch

MILDENSTEIN CASTLE

With a history dating all the way back to 1046, Mildenstein has seen men and empires rise and fall for the better part of a millenium. Often hosting interesting exhibitions, it's well worth the trip. Opening hours change throughout the year, so make sure to check ahead.

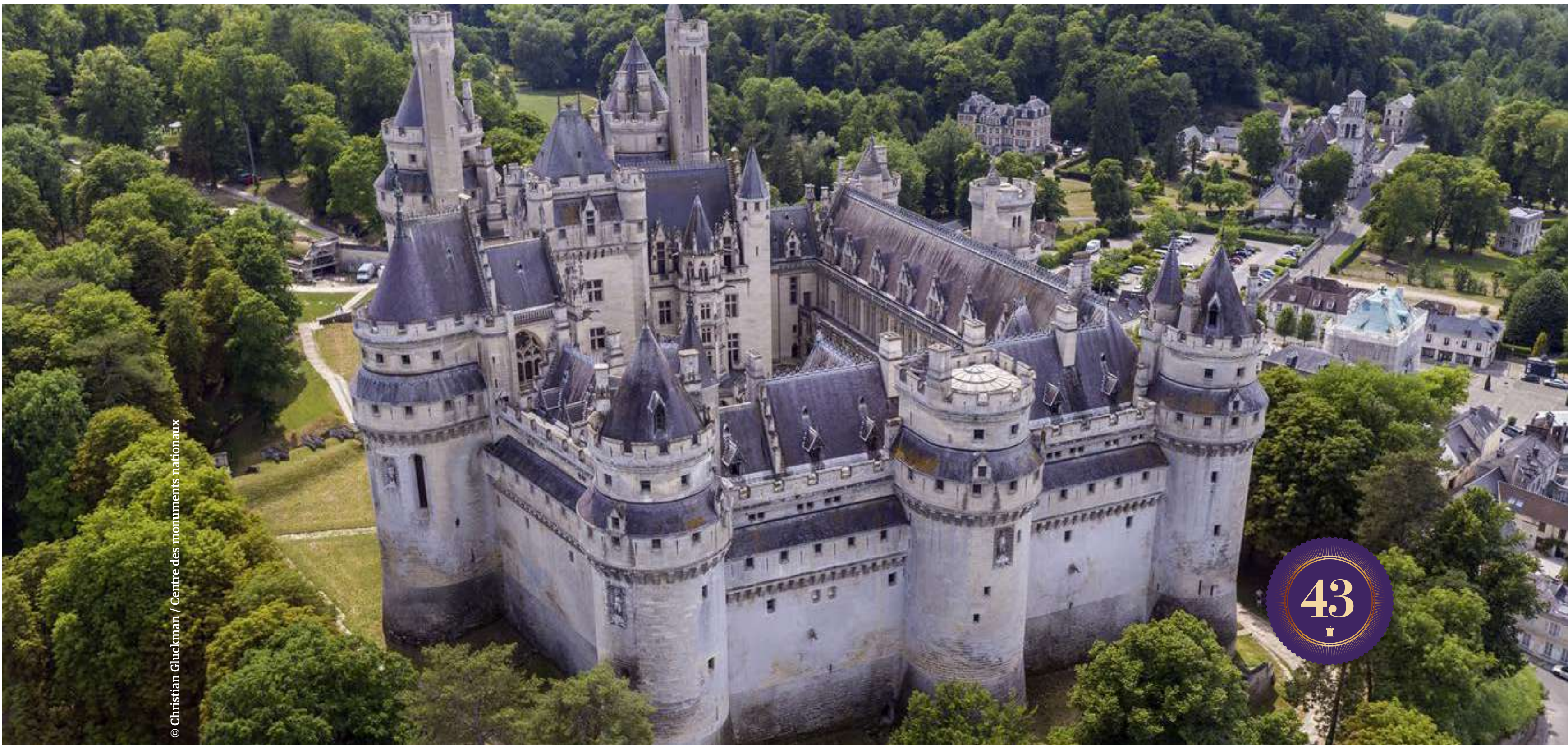
© Maja Dumat

KRIEBSTEIN CASTLE

Want to revisit the era of knights in shining armour and ladies of the court? Take a trip to Kriebstein and have a wander through the beautiful buildings. Situated between Dresden, Chemnitz and Leipzig, it would be a shame to miss out.

FRENCH CHÂTEAUX

BEYOND THEIR BEAUTY, FRANCE'S CHÂTEAUX ARE LIVING, BREATHING MONUMENTS TO THE COUNTRY'S COLOURFUL PAST, ALMIGHTY STAGES FOR MURDERS, CONSPIRACIES AND ILLICIT AFFAIRS



© Christian Gluckman / Centre des monuments nationaux

Having stood at the forefront of European power for centuries, hundreds of castles loom over the valleys, rivers and hills of France, monuments to the greatness of years gone by. With glittering moats, vine-strangled towers and sprawling ramparts, the country's countless picturesque châteaux are as varied as they are magnificent.

Sitting 50 miles northeast of Paris, the white stone turrets of Pierrefonds stretch heavenward from the bowels of the Compiègne Forest. Built in the late 14th century, the sprawling fortress lay in ruin for decades before Napoleon III commissioned renowned architect Eugène Viollet-le-Duc to rebuild it as the perfect Medieval castle. The result was a flamboyant blend of restoration and sheer imagination.

The castle's eight towers are adorned with statues of warriors and knights, including Julius

CHÂTEAU DE PIERREFONDS ^

PIERREFONDS, FRANCE

ENTRY FEE

ADULTS €8; REDUCED €6.50

OPENING HOURS

TIMES CHANGE THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

WEBSITE

WWW.CHATEAU-PIERREFONDS.FR/EN

44

CHÂTEAU GAILLARD ^

LES ANDELYS, FRANCE

ENTRY FEE

ADULTS €3.50; REDUCED €3

OPENING HOURS

OPENING HOURS VARY THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

WEBSITE

EN.NORMANDIE-TOURISME.FR

Caesar, Alexander the Great and Charlemagne. Once accessed via drawbridge, the interior courtyard is flanked by grandiose state rooms, the chapel and a square tower. Protected within the keep, the grand reception room is draped in impressive Hungarian oak sculptures of fantastical beasts, symbolising imperial power. Gargoyles and mythical creatures grace every surface, including the eccentric sculpture of a frog with a pelican's head and bats' wings. In the vaulted dungeons, an eerie procession of funerary statues are brought to life with light and sound, while above ground, immersive installations explore the folklore of the forest.

Lying west of Pierrefonds, Château Gaillard crowns a hilltop overlooking the Seine. Built on the orders of Richard the Lionheart, the Medieval castle was constructed in just two years, while comparable structures took more than a decade to finish.

Despite its speedy construction, Gaillard was a masterpiece of military innovation. Its concentric design boasted three fortress-like baileys, each protected by a rock-cut dry moat. In addition, it was one of the first European castles to use machicolations – openings in the floor where hot oil or heavy objects were thrown onto invaders.

Today, the once-mighty fortress lies in ruins, though substantial portions still stand, including the inner bailey, which boasts a curved, scallop design, pierced by arrow slits. The innovative shape was devised to endure the impact of siege engines, denying enemies a perfectly flat surface to attack. In addition, the arrow slits built into the rounded wall gave archers a wider angle of attack.

Though Gaillard's remnants offer a glimpse into the imagination of one of history's most legendary figures, the fortress only remained unconquered for a few years, echoing the demise of its mastermind.

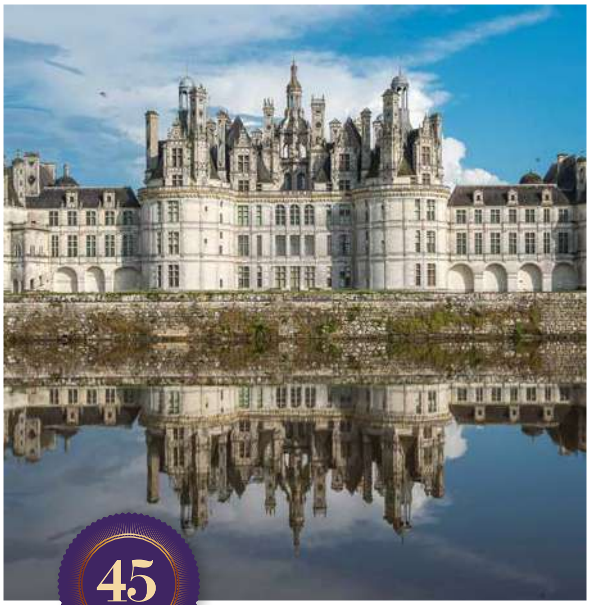
Around 170 miles to the south, the sandstone masterpiece, Château de Chambord, emerges from the verdant Loire Valley. Nestled in Europe's largest enclosed forest, a park the size of Paris, the castle's sweeping facade is adorned with six giant towers, 800 columns and almost 300 chimneys.

An extravagant celebration of Renaissance architecture, the colossal château was built by Francis I to impress and intimidate simultaneously. Designed as a hunting lodge, construction on the castle began in 1519 but never truly finished, as costs quickly began to spiral. Though famed for its fairy-tale facade, the château's sumptuous interior proves just as striking. Its coup de grace is delivered by the sweeping double-helix staircase, which dominates the centre of the keep, rising three storeys high. Believed to be the work of Leonardo da Vinci, the ingenious design means those who rise and those who descend never cross paths.

From the iconic staircase, long halls spill out in the shape of a Greek cross, leading to 426 rooms. On the second floor, vaulted stone ceilings are elegantly embellished with Francis' heraldic symbols – salamanders spitting out water and the letter 'F', adorned with vines, knotted ropes and the fleur-de-lis.

Outside, the formal gardens tie the château to the forest. Ribbons of flowerbeds and hedges crisscross the estate, which is dotted with native cherry trees and topiaries, shaped to playfully echo the castle's pointed turrets. The gardens give way to woodland, which hums with red deer, wild boar and osprey. During summer, the grounds burst into life with equestrian and bird shows.

From Chambord, the Royal Château de Blois is but a stone's



45

CHÂTEAU DE CHAMBORD

CHAMBORD, FRANCE

ENTRY FEE

ADULTS €14.50; REDUCED €12

OPENING HOURS

OPENING HOURS VARY

WEBSITE

WWW.CHAMBORD.ORG/EN

46

CHÂTEAU ROYAL DE BLOIS
BLOIS, FRANCE
ENTRY FEE
ADULTS €12; CHILDREN €6.50
OPENING HOURS
OPENING HOURS VARY
WEBSITE
EN.CHATEAUDEBLOIS.FR

throw. Looming high over its namesake town, the castle was a centre of power for centuries, home to ten queens and seven kings.

Built in phases between the 13th to 17th centuries, its four grand wings chart the evolution of castle architecture, from Gothic to early Renaissance and finally Classical. The Gothic wing is a cacophony or colour, where tiled floors meet intricately patterned walls. Gilded wooden panelling cleverly conceals secret cupboards, where Catherine de' Medici, Henry II's Machiavellian wife, is believed to have hidden poison.

Elsewhere, the king's bedchamber was the backdrop to one of the bloodiest scenes in the château's history, when Henry III ordered his royal bodyguards to murder Duke Henry I de Guise as he hid behind a tapestry. He was assassinated just months later by a merciless monk. The castle also played host to Joan of Arc's blessing, before she went on to break the English siege of Orléans in 1429. In the Louis XII wing, the Musée des Beaux-Arts houses 300 paintings, sculptures and tapestries. Meanwhile, the inner courtyard features a lavish ceremonial staircase, weaving indoors and outdoors.

Just ten miles west of Blois, Chaumont-sur-Loire nestles comfortably between the banks of the Loire and valley's verdant fields. Built in the 11th century, Chaumont was razed to the ground by Louis XI in 1465 and rebuilt a few years later. After Catherine de' Medici acquired it, she gave it to her former rival, Diane de Poitiers, in exchange for Château de Chenonceau.

Today, Catherine's room is adorned with an intricate tapestry, depicting the story of Perseus and Pegasus, alongside a life-sized portrait of herself. Meanwhile, her ceremonial bed is engraved with warriors, horns of plenty, garlands of fruit and mystical mermaids.

However, the château's crowning jewel is its sprawling gardens. Designed by renowned architects and landscape artists, they feature a stunning rose orchard, alongside English and Japanese gardens. While the Water garden features whirlpools and waterfalls, the Mirror garden explores the theme of renewal.

Deeper into Loire Valley, Château d'Amboise rises from the foundations of an old Gallic fortress. Amboise's strategic position made it an important royal residence to several French kings, including Henry II and his wife, Catherine de' Medici, who raised their children there, alongside

47

© E.Sander

“CHAUMONT WAS RAZED TO THE GROUND BY LOUIS XI”

DOMAINE DE CHAUMONT-SUR-LOIRE
CHAUMONT-SUR-LOIRE, FRANCE
ENTRY FEE
PRICES VARY ACCORDING TO SEASON
OPENING HOURS
OPENING HOURS VARY
WEBSITE
WWW.DOMAINE-CHAUMONT.FRW

48

CHÂTEAU D'AMBOISE

AMBOISE, FRANCE

ENTRY FEE

ADULTS €12.80;
CHILDREN €8.80

OPENING HOURS

OPENING HOURS VARY

WEBSITE

WWW.CHATEAU-AMBOISE.COM

Mary, Queen of Scots. For the last three years of his life, and even in death, da Vinci also called it home. Today, the genius lies beneath the ceilings and stained glass windows of the castle's chapel.

Like most châteaux, Amboise has witnessed its fair share of violence and intrigue. After Henry II died, courtiers unveiled a conspiracy to abduct the teenage King Francis. Determined to quash the rebellion, over 1,000 Protestants were disembowelled and hung from the castle walls.

Although Charles IX and Henry III were among the last monarchs to visit the castle, it remains an enduring symbol of the Renaissance. First built in magnificent Gothic style, the enormous Heurtault and Les Minimes towers were later decorated with Italian flair, inspired by the king's trip to Naples. The gardens were another beneficiary of this vision, curated by the monk Dom Pacello, though these have since blended into the picturesque surroundings. Overlooking the Loire, the castle hides its historic scars beneath a stunning façade of white and blue, breathing an air of melodrama into the idyllic market town at its feet.

Gracefully straddling the River Cher atop an arched bridge, the eternally charming Château de Chenonceau sits in perfect harmony with its surroundings - the white walls and turrets rising from the water. Having been built, restored and protected by a series of powerful women - including Catherine Briçonnet, Diane de Poitiers and Catherine de' Medici - Chenonceau was dubbed The Ladies' Castle.

Today, an extraordinary collection of paintings by the Old Masters - Rubens, Poussin and Murillo - is protected within its keep. Meanwhile, silk-wrapped rooms, roaring fires and beautiful floral arrangements offer a glimpse into the lives of the château's storied residents. The sombre,

CHÂTEAU DE CHENONCEAU

CHENONCEAU, FRANCE

ENTRY FEE

ADULTS €14.50; CHILDREN €11.50

OPENING HOURS

OPENING HOURS VARY

WEBSITE

WWW.CHENONCEAU.COM/EN

49

CHÂTEAU D'USSÉ >
RIGNY-USSÉ, FRANCE
ENTRY FEE
ADULTS €14; CHILDREN €4
OPENING HOURS
OPENING HOURS VARY
WEBSITE
WWW.CHATEAUDUSSE.FR

50

black-walled chambers of Louise of Lorraine, who spent her final years mourning the death of her beloved Henry III, are filled with mementos and macabre tapestries, embellished with the skull-and-crossbones.

Meanwhile a 60-metre-long chequerboard floor, which still sweeps through the Grande Galerie, once bore witness to a string of sophisticated parties. Outside, the formal gardens pay homage to two of France's most formidable females, with Catherine's garden on one side of the estate and Diane's on the other.

40 miles west of Chenonceau lies Château d'Ussé, the inspiration for Charles Perrault's *Sleeping Beauty*. Emerging from the Chinon forest, the castle's Gothic turrets and picture-perfect chimneys soar above its formal terraced gardens. The château's pièce de résistance, they were designed by celebrated landscape artist Andre Le Nôtre, who created the gardens at Versailles.

Amid the flowerbeds and lemon trees sits the estate's tiny-but-charming chapel. Close by, two Lebanese cedars stand tall – a gift from the famous poet René de Chateaubriand to the duchess of Duras. When he died in 1848, it's believed she stopped all of the clocks in the castle. Underground, in the octagonal dungeon, iconic scenes from *Sleeping Beauty* come to life, with statues of the wicked Carabosse, Prince Charming and Aurora's famed fairy godmothers.

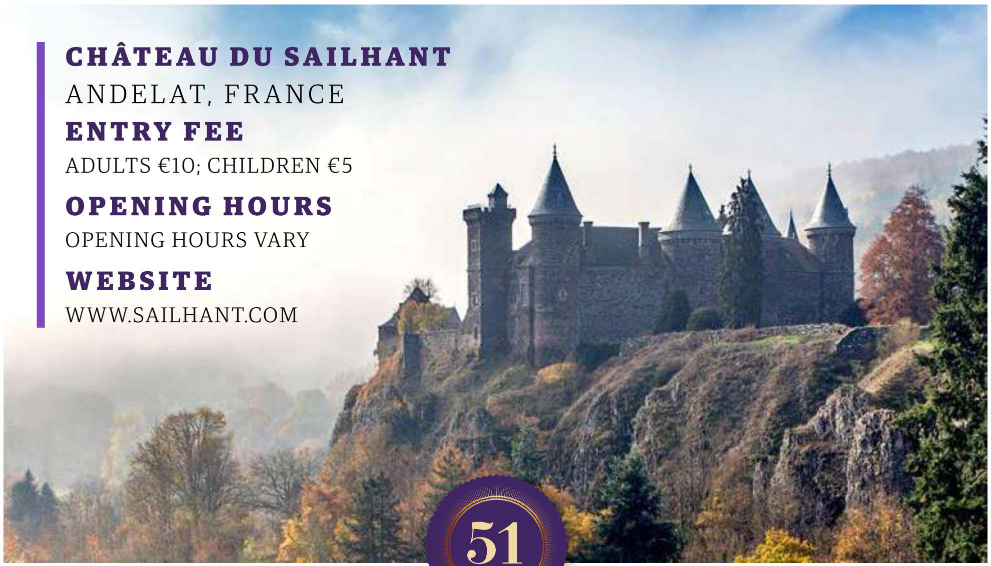
Before leaving Loire Valley, the avant-garde Château de Montsoreau beckons. A shining example of French Renaissance architecture, it was also one of the first châteaux designed for pleasure rather than defence. Built in 1450, it housed a 17-metre-long ceremonial hall, punctuated by five enormous windows and two fireplaces.

Having inspired artists for centuries, from Rodin to Turner, in 2016 the castle was reborn as a museum of contemporary art. Housing Philippe Méaille's private collection, it boasts the world's largest selection of works from the Art & Language collective. Exhibitions unfold in a range of mediums, such as paintings, sculptures, drawings, installations and videos, exploring the fusion of intellectual ideas and concerns with the creation of art.

Over 300 miles south of Loire Valley, the fortified walls of Château du Sailhant cling elegantly to a volcanic spur, suspended high above the carpeted forest below. Begun in the 10th century, the imposing walls were crafted from locally-sourced grey lava stone – as were the castle's sky-piercing turreted towers.

> **"ICONIC SCENES FROM SLEEPING BEAUTY COME TO LIFE"**

CHÂTEAU DU SAILHANT
ANDELAT, FRANCE
ENTRY FEE
ADULTS €10; CHILDREN €5
OPENING HOURS
OPENING HOURS VARY
WEBSITE
WWW.SAILHANT.COM



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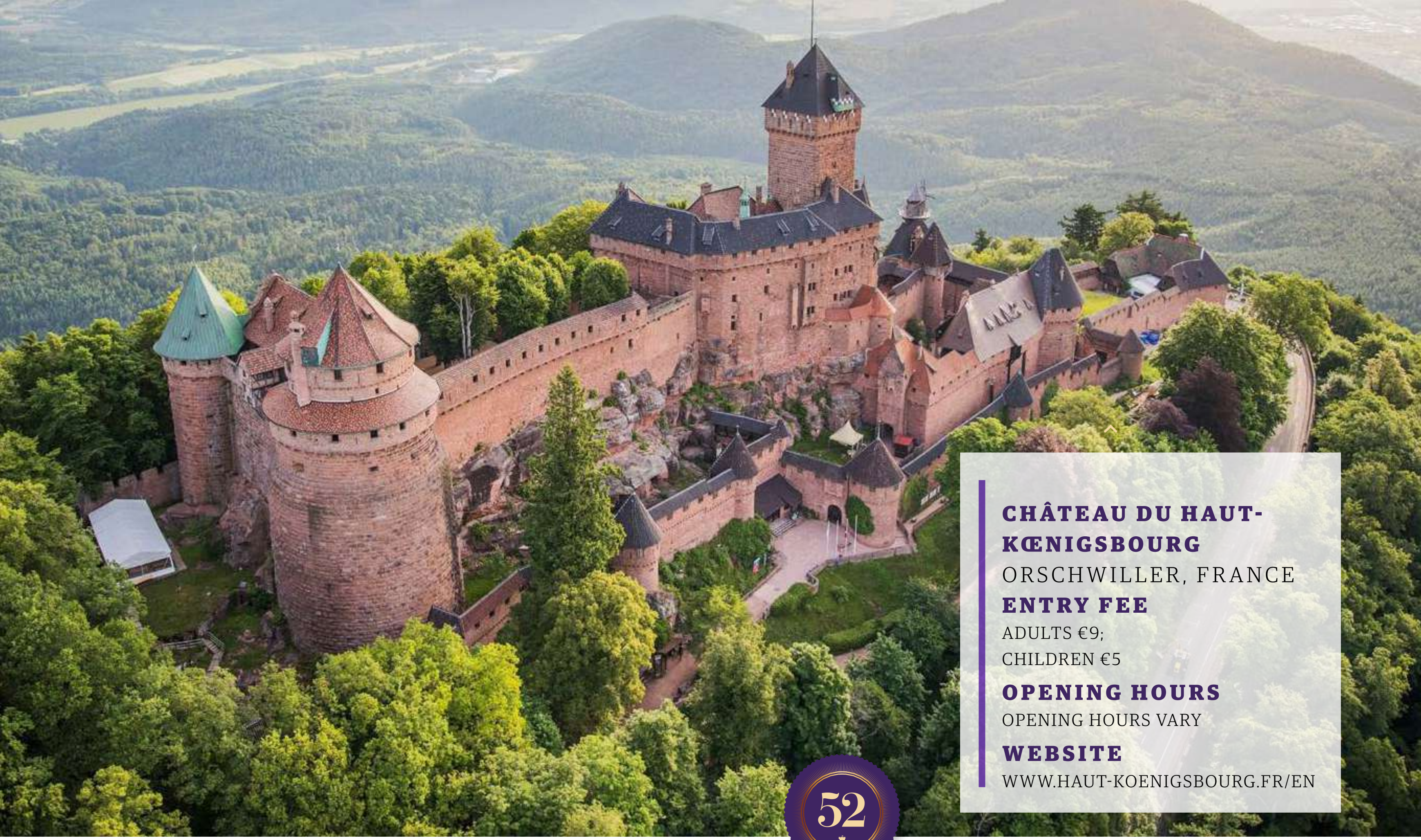


52

CHÂTEAU DU HAUT-KŒNIGSBOURG
ORSCHWILLER, FRANCE
ENTRY FEE
ADULTS €9;
CHILDREN €5
OPENING HOURS
OPENING HOURS VARY
WEBSITE
WWW.HAUT-KOENIGSBOURG.FR/EN

During the Hundred Years' War, the formidable fortress, which is only accessible from one moated side, became hotly contested, bouncing between the English and the French. Today, the château is owned by architect Joseph Pell Lombardi, who oversaw a decade-long, sympathetic restoration. The salon has been returned to its former glory – complete with Louis XIII chairs and velvet-topped games tables, as well as an original 16th-century fireplace. In the kitchen, blue-and-white tiles adorn walls hung with huge copper pans, while the library houses elaborately hand-carved wooden desks and chairs.

Around 400 miles away, close to the Swiss border, Haut-Kœnigsbourg reveals itself. Perched high atop an enormous forested hill, amid a sea of dark green, the magnificent red-brick complex blossoms over the landscape. Impossibly impenetrable and all-seeing, Haut-Kœnigsbourg offers not only stunning panoramic views across the Vosges Mountains and Black Forest, all the way to the Alps, but a glimpse into France's tumultuous past. The castle was built 760 metres above the Alsace Plain in 1147, embodying the immortal ethos of location, location, location. After its destruction, it was rebuilt by the Tierstiens – who beefed it up with anti-artillery defences.

However, when it was ruined again during the Thirty Years' War, it remained abandoned for two centuries, until finally being renovated by the occupying Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany – to whom it symbolised a lost period of German supremacy. Every inch of the castle is packed with a magnetism of nostalgic melodrama, drawing guests over the imposing drawbridge, towards its immaculate spiral staircases, apartments dripping in Old World opulence and assorted medieval instruments of war. A journey to the top of the grand bastion presents the finest viewpoint of them all, overseeing the castle's courtyard, armoury, inn, mill and many corridors of intrigue.

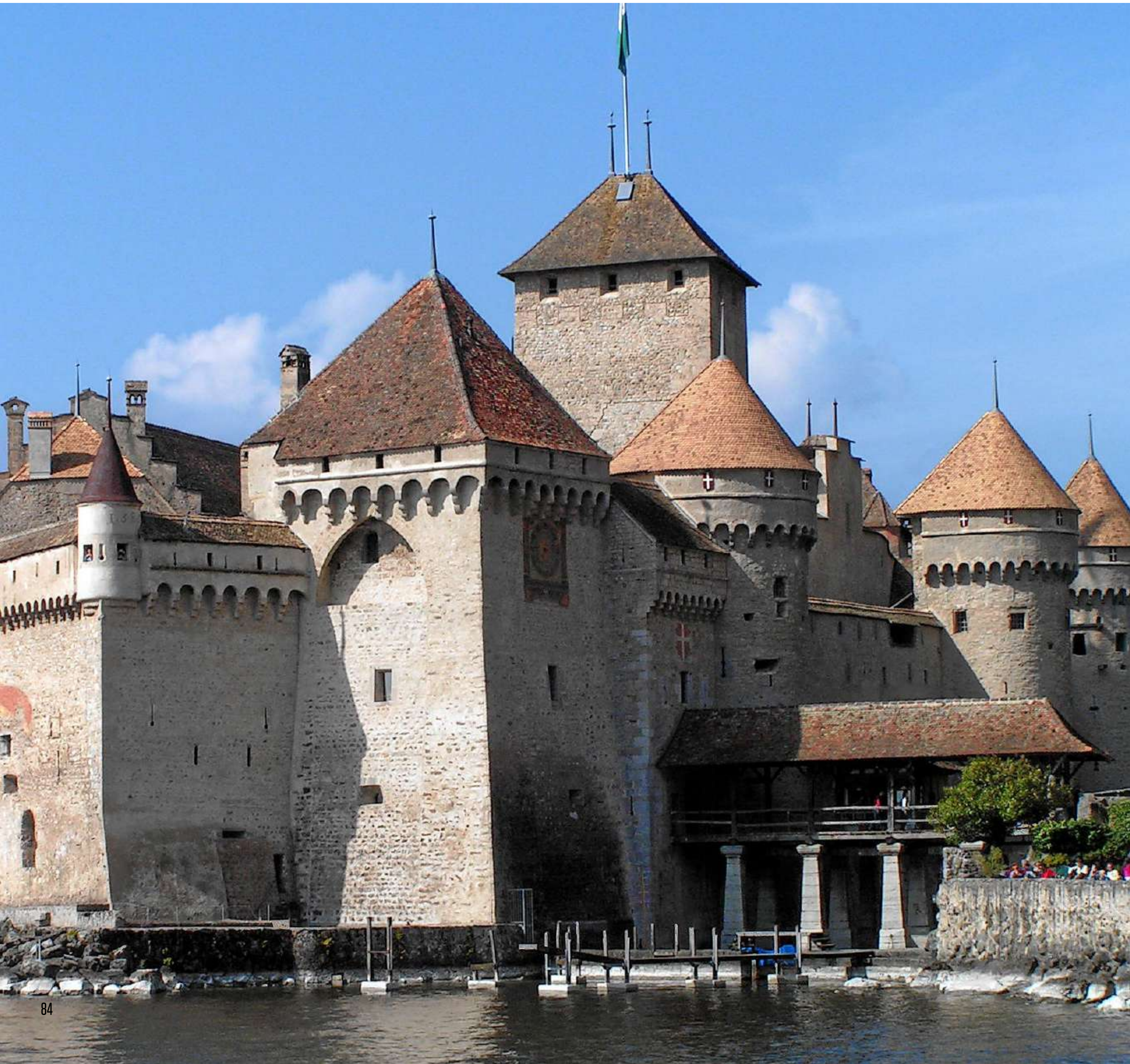
CHÂTEAU DE MONTSOREAU – MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART
MONTSOREAU, FRANCE
ENTRY FEE
ADULTS €9.80;
CHILDREN €5.80
OPENING HOURS OPENING HOURS VARY
WEBSITE WWW.CHATEAU-MONTSOREAU.COM

53

NUMBER

54

VEYTAUX
SWITZERLAND



ENTRY FEE

ADULTS CHF 12.50; CHILDREN CHF 6

OPENING HOURS

APRIL - SEPTEMBER 9AM-7PM; NOVEMBER - FEBRUARY 10AM-5PM; MARCH & OCTOBER 9.30AM-6PM

WEBSITE

WWW.CHILLON.CH/EN

CHÂTEAU DE CHILLON

On the shore of Lake Geneva, close to the French border, sits Château de Chillon. First mentioned in 1150, it was under the control of the counts of Savoy, but the Bernese took over in 1536, and Chillon became their main centre of operations, serving as a fortress, arsenal and prison. When the Bernese left around 1800, it became national property. Its beautiful location attracted writers and artists throughout the 19th century, and it still draws thousands of visitors each year. Only an hour and a half from Bern and Geneva, it's easy to reach and you're sure to be in for a wonderful day.

CASTLES OF RUSSIA

DISCOVER THE STRONGHOLDS USED BY TSARS AND COMMISSARS

VYBORG CASTLE

CASTLE IN THE BALTIC SEA

55

VYBORG
RUSSIA

Although some parts of the castle on a tiny islet in the Gulf of Finland date back to 1293, much of the pretty fort that can be seen today is the result of late-19th-century renovations. Wander across the bridge, trace the walls, visit the museum and climb to the top of St Olaf's Tower for stunning views of the small city across the water.

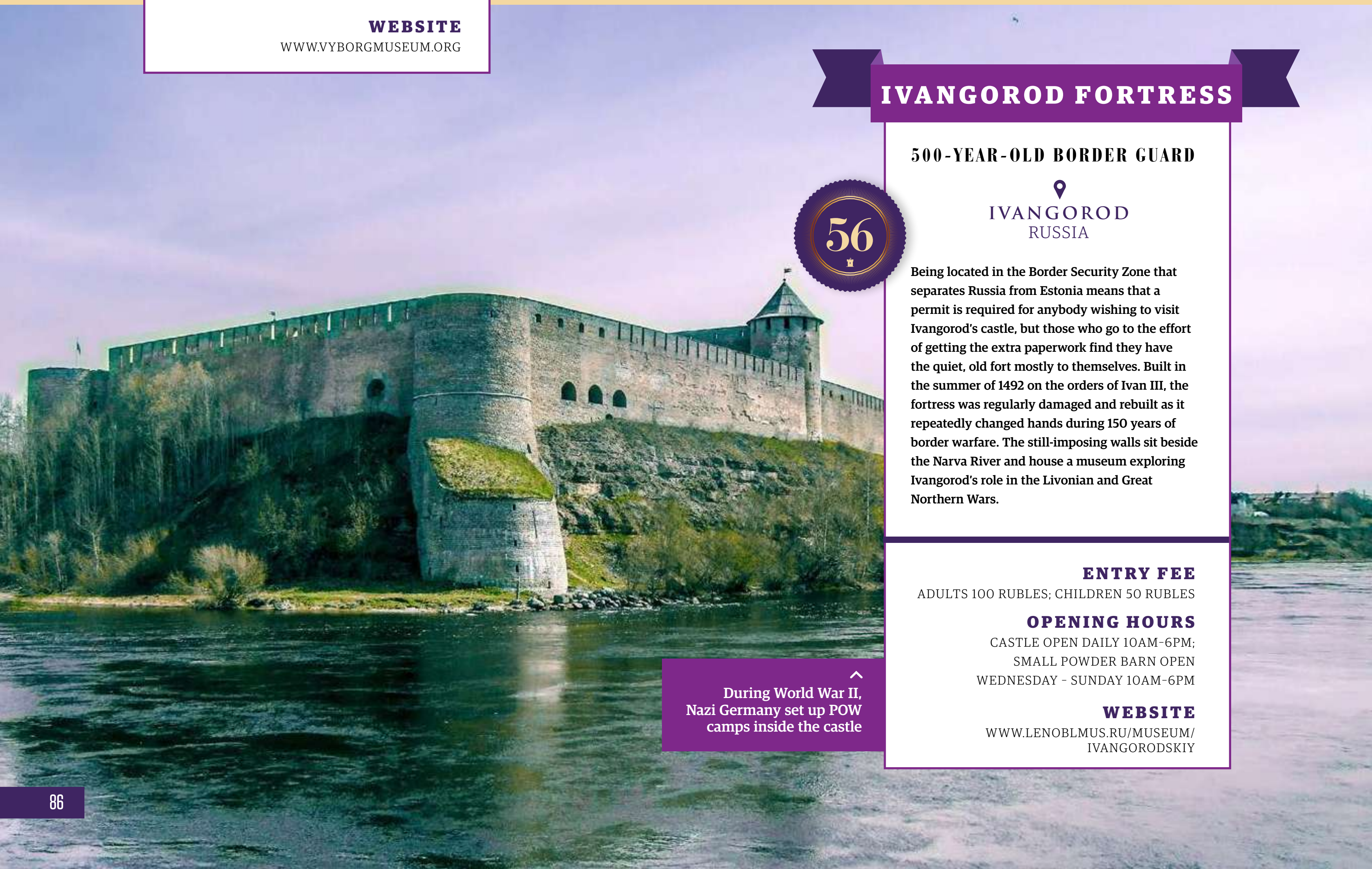
ENTRY FEE
VARIOUS CHARGES APPLY FOR ISLAND, MUSEUM AND TOWER

OPENING HOURS
CASTLE ISLAND OPEN DAILY 9AM-7PM;
MUSEUM OPEN TUESDAY – SUNDAY 10AM-6PM

WEBSITE
WWW.VYBORGMUSEUM.ORG

Vyborg was originally one of the major Finnish castles

Credit: wiki. Maleevsw



IVANGOROD FORTRESS

500-YEAR-OLD BORDER GUARD

56

IVANGOROD
RUSSIA

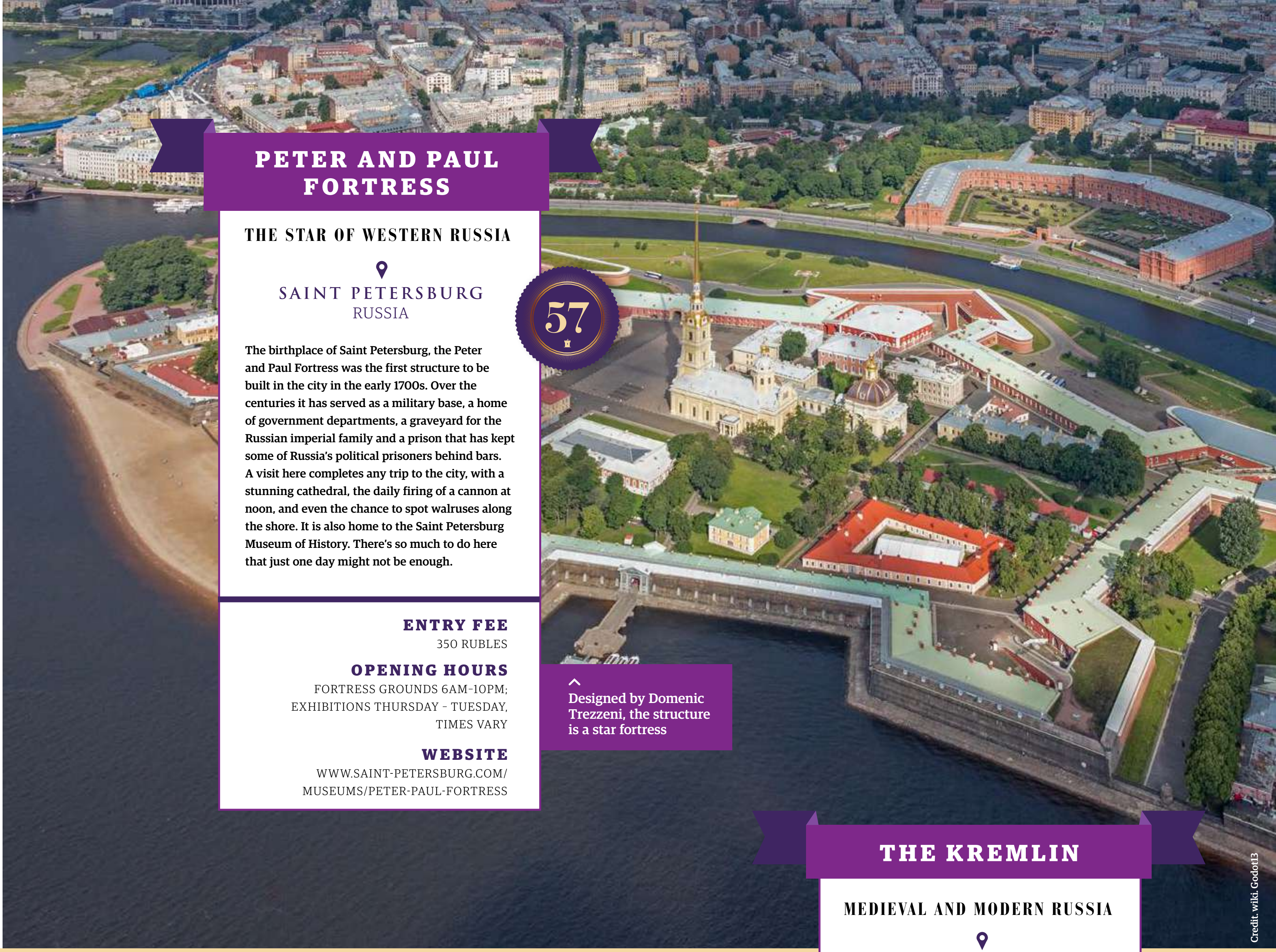
Being located in the Border Security Zone that separates Russia from Estonia means that a permit is required for anybody wishing to visit Ivangorod's castle, but those who go to the effort of getting the extra paperwork find they have the quiet, old fort mostly to themselves. Built in the summer of 1492 on the orders of Ivan III, the fortress was regularly damaged and rebuilt as it repeatedly changed hands during 150 years of border warfare. The still-imposing walls sit beside the Narva River and house a museum exploring Ivangorod's role in the Livonian and Great Northern Wars.

ENTRY FEE
ADULTS 100 RUBLES; CHILDREN 50 RUBLES

OPENING HOURS
CASTLE OPEN DAILY 10AM-6PM;
SMALL POWDER BARN OPEN
WEDNESDAY – SUNDAY 10AM-6PM

WEBSITE
WWW.LENOBLMUS.RU/MUSEUM/IVANGORODSKIY

During World War II, Nazi Germany set up POW camps inside the castle



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PETER AND PAUL FORTRESS

THE STAR OF WESTERN RUSSIA

SAINT PETERSBURG
RUSSIA

The birthplace of Saint Petersburg, the Peter and Paul Fortress was the first structure to be built in the city in the early 1700s. Over the centuries it has served as a military base, a home of government departments, a graveyard for the Russian imperial family and a prison that has kept some of Russia's political prisoners behind bars. A visit here completes any trip to the city, with a stunning cathedral, the daily firing of a cannon at noon, and even the chance to spot walruses along the shore. It is also home to the Saint Petersburg Museum of History. There's so much to do here that just one day might not be enough.

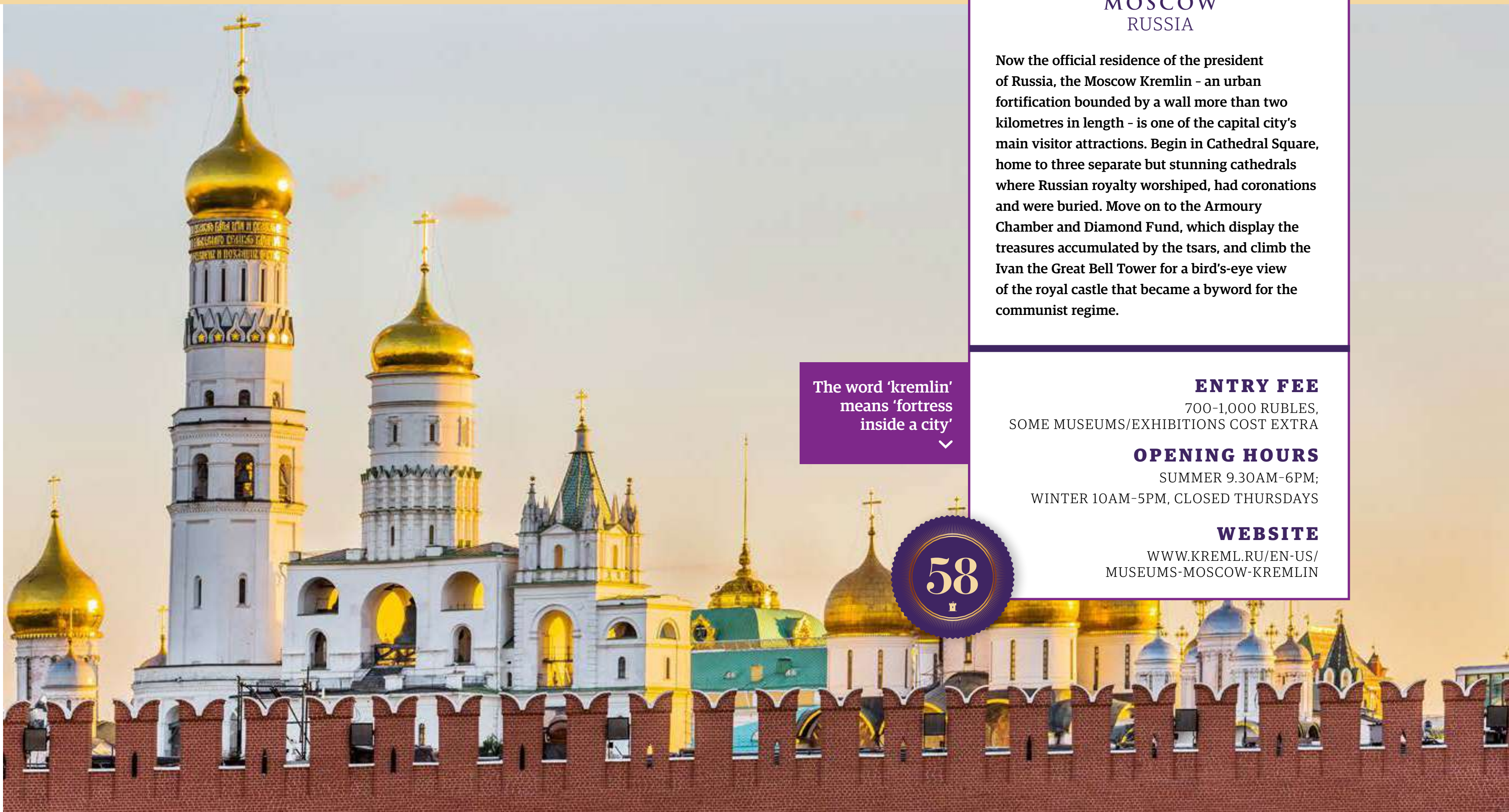
ENTRY FEE
350 RUBLES

OPENING HOURS
FORTRESS GROUNDS 6AM-10PM;
EXHIBITIONS THURSDAY - TUESDAY,
TIMES VARY

WEBSITE
WWW.SAINT-PETERSBURG.COM/
MUSEUMS/PETER-PAUL-FORTRESS

Designed by Domenic Trezzeni, the structure is a star fortress

Credit: wiki Godot13



THE KREMLIN

MEDIEVAL AND MODERN RUSSIA

MOSCOW
RUSSIA

Now the official residence of the president of Russia, the Moscow Kremlin – an urban fortification bounded by a wall more than two kilometres in length – is one of the capital city's main visitor attractions. Begin in Cathedral Square, home to three separate but stunning cathedrals where Russian royalty worshiped, had coronations and were buried. Move on to the Armoury Chamber and Diamond Fund, which display the treasures accumulated by the tsars, and climb the Ivan the Great Bell Tower for a bird's-eye view of the royal castle that became a byword for the communist regime.

The word 'kremlin' means 'fortress inside a city'

ENTRY FEE
700-1,000 RUBLES,
SOME MUSEUMS/EXHIBITIONS COST EXTRA

OPENING HOURS
SUMMER 9.30AM-6PM;
WINTER 10AM-5PM, CLOSED THURSDAYS

WEBSITE
WWW.KREML.RU/EN-US/
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58

ALCÁZAR OF SEGOVIA

BEAUTIFUL AND FORMIDABLE, THIS SPANISH CASTLE CUTS AN IMPOSING FIGURE ON ITS GRANITE PEDESTAL

SEGOVIA
SPAIN

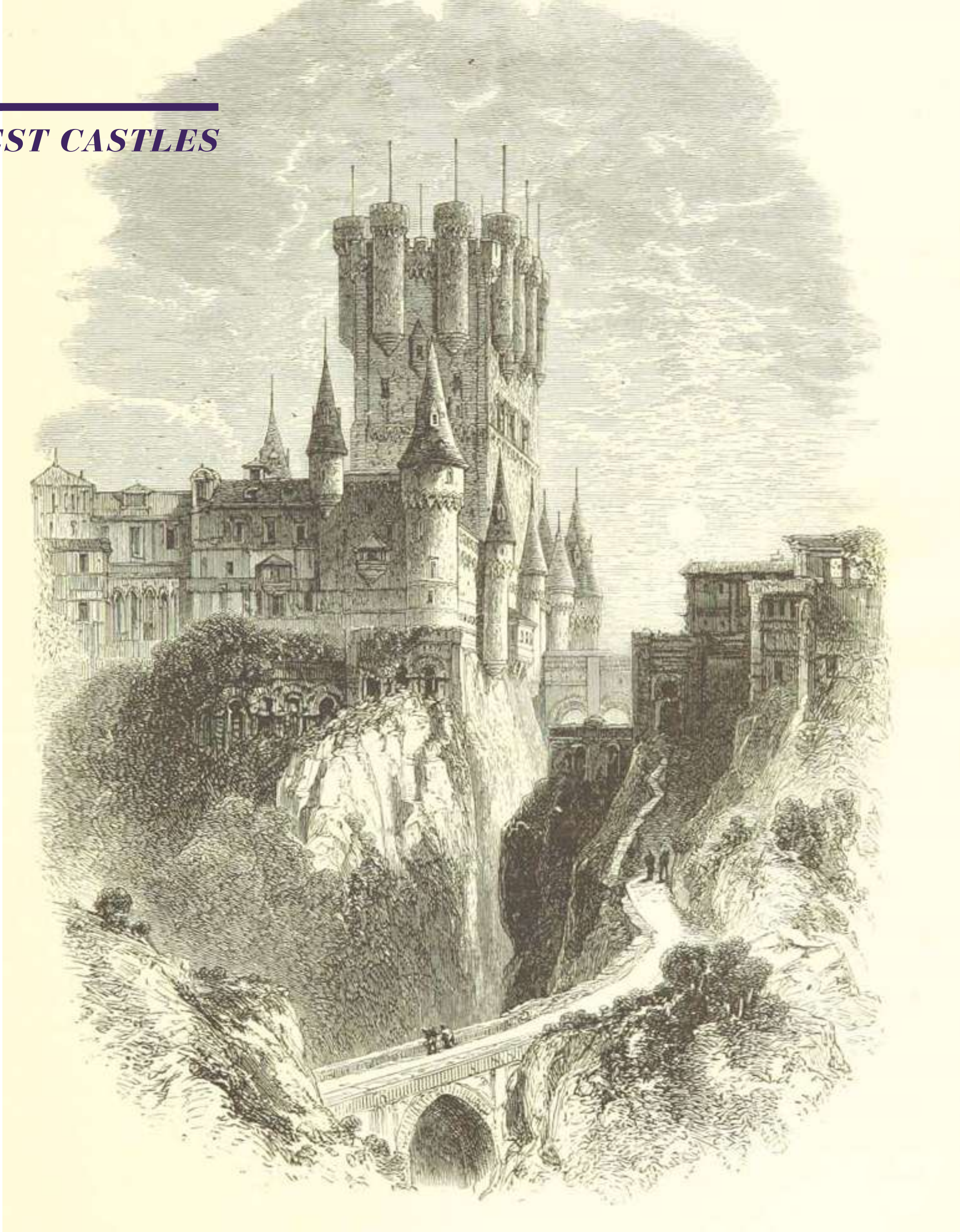
NUMBER

59

WORDS BY ◆ ROSS HAMILTON

ALCÁZAR OF SEGOVIA

ENTRY FEE
ADULTS €8; CHILDREN €3.50
OPENING HOURS
APRIL – OCTOBER 10AM–8PM;
NOVEMBER – MARCH 10AM–6PM
WEBSITE
WWW.ALCAZARDESEGOVIA.COM



An etching of the Alcázar of Segovia from *Through Spain: A Narrative of Travel and Adventure Illustrated*

There's something vaguely biblical in the way the Alcázar of Segovia juts out over the Castilian landscape - a majestic stone ark seemingly deposited on its peak by a great flood. But while the reality of the castle's construction is somewhat less miraculous in reality, it remains a truly divine example of Medieval Spanish architecture.

For more than a millennium there has been a fortress overlooking the fertile land between the rivers Eresma and Clamores. The Romans recognised the potential of the site, and they built the first structure atop the granite crag, before it was expanded upon during the Moorish occupation of Spain in the subsequent centuries.

As an almost impregnable fort, the alcázar, as it would become known in the 12th century, was of no small strategic value. But upon the region's transition to Christianity it began to take on an even greater significance. Generations of Castilian royals made it their favoured home, holding court and contributing to the castle's melting pot of architectural styles, quirks and alterations. Though many of their additions would perish in a savage 19th-century fire, the alcázar that exists today is an astonishingly faithful renovation.

After falling out of favour as a royal residence, with post-Medieval monarchs drawn increasingly to the burgeoning metropolis of Madrid, the alcázar struggled for a purpose. For a time it served as a prison, but this was hardly fitting of one of Spain's most majestic buildings. More recent rulers sought to rectify this injustice, and in doing so they managed to link the palace's contemporary significance with its martial past. For almost 200 years the alcázar housed first the Royal Artillery School, then a military college. Today it is the home of the General Military Archive.

A TOWERING ACHIEVEMENT

THE ALCÁZAR'S HIGHEST POINT OFFERS BREATHTAKING VIEWS OF THE LANDSCAPE

Centuries of monarchs, both Castilian and later Spanish, have left their mark on Segovia's iconic castle in one way or another. But none of their contributions stand quite as proudly as that of John II. Built during the first half of the 15th century, the tower that bears his name dominates the alcázar's southwestern facade, its obstinately angular form setting it quite apart from the tapered spires that rise around it.

For anyone who is willing to ascend the tower's 156 steep stairs, the payoff is truly tremendous. As the pinnacle of a palace already built on a lofty peak, it's no surprise that the tower is a source of some stunning vistas. With an unparalleled view from the battlements of the city, the John II tower is best place to take in Segovia's other impressive sights, including its spectacular Gothic cathedral and the incredibly preserved Roman aqueduct running through Segovia's centre.

SHELTERED COURTYARDS

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL SPACES COMPLEMENT EACH OTHER BEAUTIFULLY

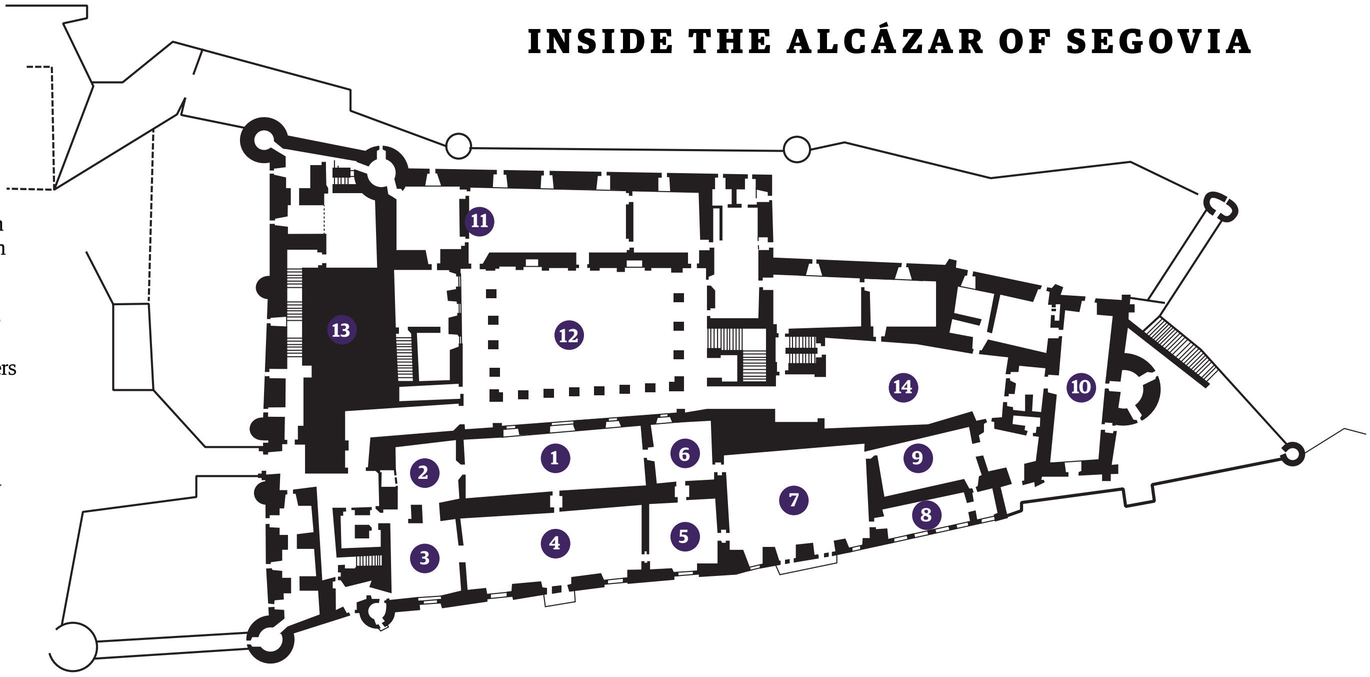
Prior to Segovia's capture by Alfonso VI during the Reconquista, the alcázar was an Arab fort built by the Almoravid dynasty. And though the bulk of the castle we see today remains in the Spanish Gothic style, there are a number of architectural elements that hark back to its time as a Moorish installation.

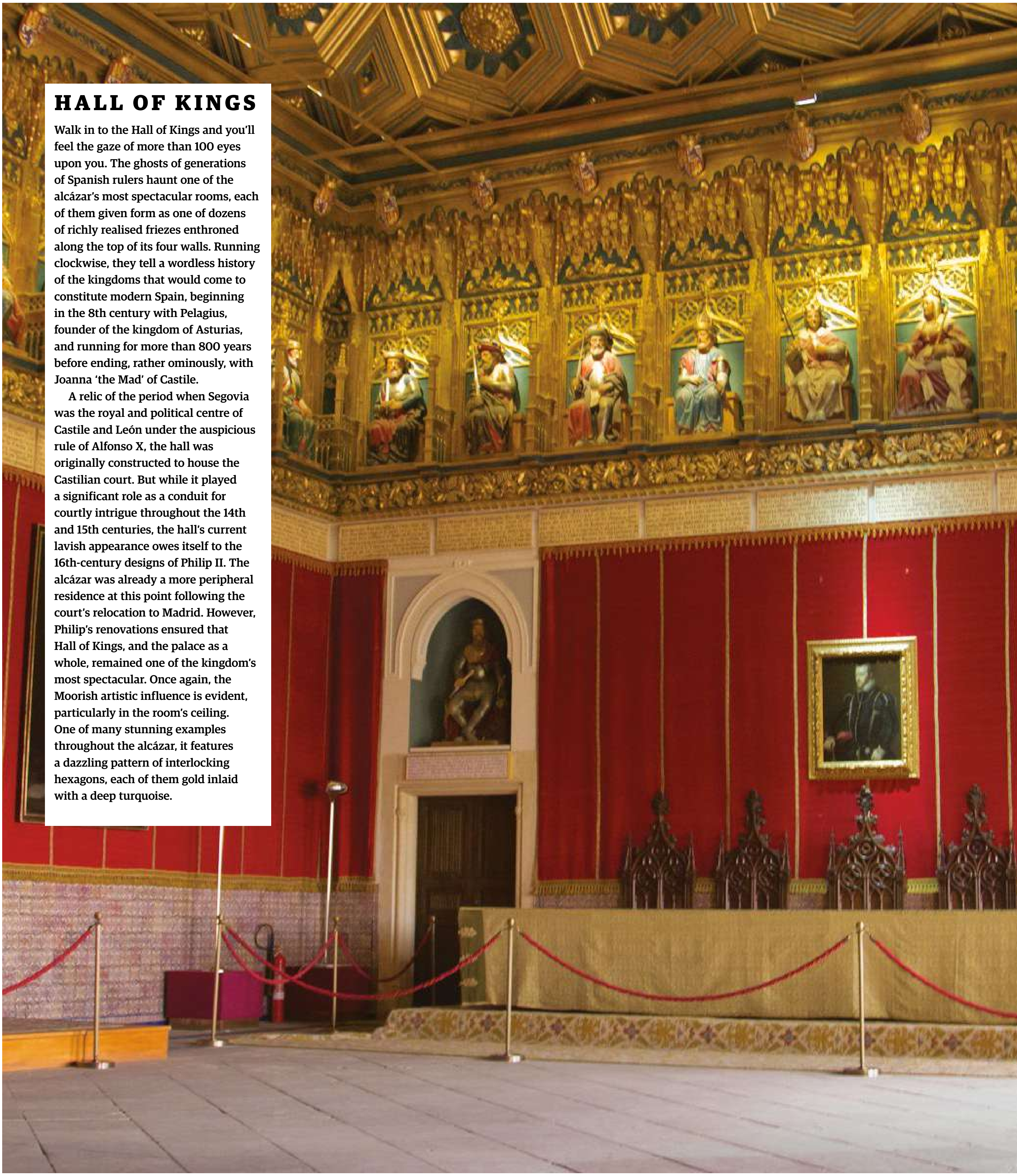
Foremost among these are its archways and courtyards. The alcázar plays home to two. The Weapons Courtyard (Patio de Armas) is flanked on three sides by arcades, and blends the Moorish elements with later Gothic and Renaissance additions, while the Clock Courtyard (Patio del Reloj) is thinner and more secluded, surrounded by the walls of several of the castle's highest towers. These architectural nods aren't the only legacy of Segovia's time as a Muslim city during the Middle Ages either - the very word 'alcázar' is derived directly from the Arabic 'al-qasr', meaning fort or castle.

INSIDE THE ALCÁZAR OF SEGOVIA

Key

1. Ajimeces Room
2. Fireplace Room
3. Throne Room
4. Galley Room
5. Hall of the Pine Cones
6. King's Chambers
7. Hall of Kings
8. Cordon Room
9. The Chapel
10. The Armoury
11. Royal Artillery College
12. The Weapons Courtyard
13. John II tower
14. The Clock Courtyard

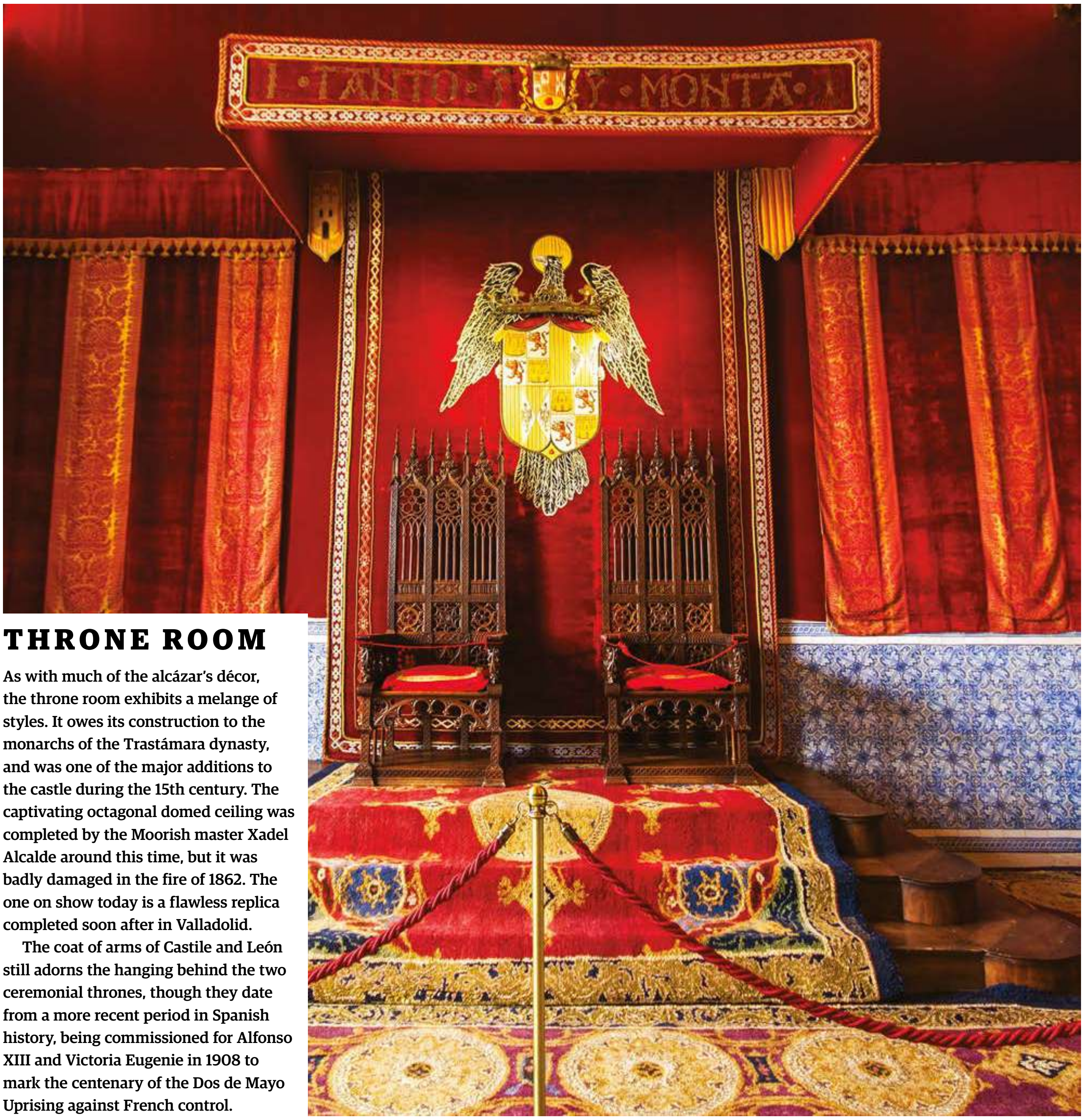




HALL OF KINGS

Walk in to the Hall of Kings and you'll feel the gaze of more than 100 eyes upon you. The ghosts of generations of Spanish rulers haunt one of the alcázar's most spectacular rooms, each of them given form as one of dozens of richly realised friezes enthroned along the top of its four walls. Running clockwise, they tell a wordless history of the kingdoms that would come to constitute modern Spain, beginning in the 8th century with Pelagius, founder of the kingdom of Asturias, and running for more than 800 years before ending, rather ominously, with Joanna 'the Mad' of Castile.

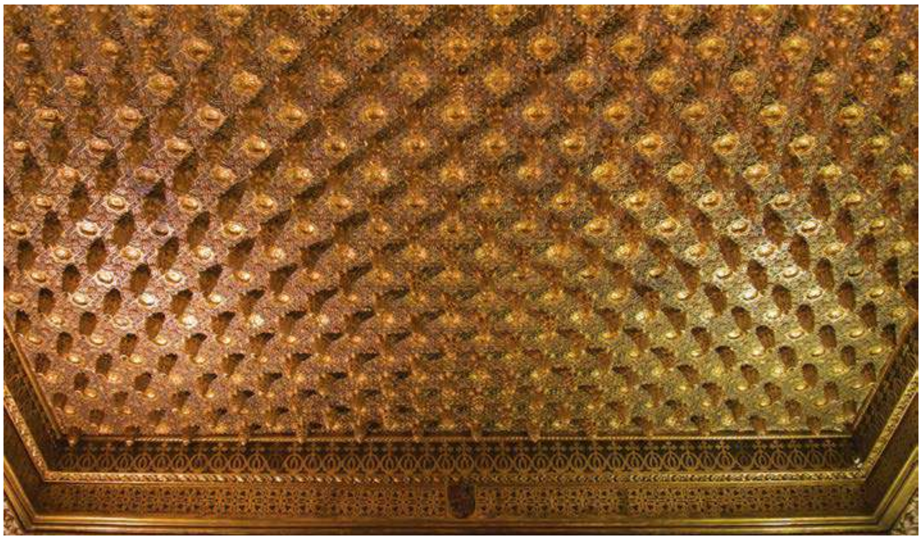
A relic of the period when Segovia was the royal and political centre of Castile and León under the auspicious rule of Alfonso X, the hall was originally constructed to house the Castilian court. But while it played a significant role as a conduit for courtly intrigue throughout the 14th and 15th centuries, the hall's current lavish appearance owes itself to the 16th-century designs of Philip II. The alcázar was already a more peripheral residence at this point following the court's relocation to Madrid. However, Philip's renovations ensured that Hall of Kings, and the palace as a whole, remained one of the kingdom's most spectacular. Once again, the Moorish artistic influence is evident, particularly in the room's ceiling. One of many stunning examples throughout the alcázar, it features a dazzling pattern of interlocking hexagons, each of them gold inlaid with a deep turquoise.



THRONE ROOM

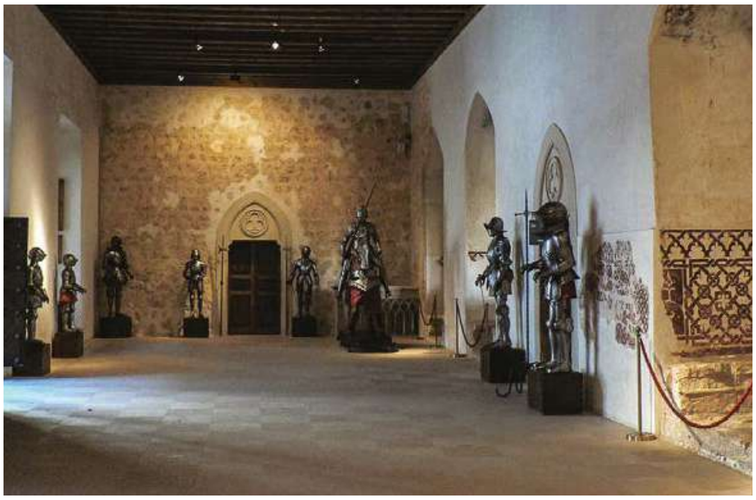
As with much of the alcázar's décor, the throne room exhibits a melange of styles. It owes its construction to the monarchs of the Trastámara dynasty, and was one of the major additions to the castle during the 15th century. The captivating octagonal domed ceiling was completed by the Moorish master Xadel Alcalde around this time, but it was badly damaged in the fire of 1862. The one on show today is a flawless replica completed soon after in Valladolid.

The coat of arms of Castile and León still adorns the hanging behind the two ceremonial thrones, though they date from a more recent period in Spanish history, being commissioned for Alfonso XIII and Victoria Eugenie in 1908 to mark the centenary of the Dos de Mayo Uprising against French control.



HALL OF THE PINE CONES

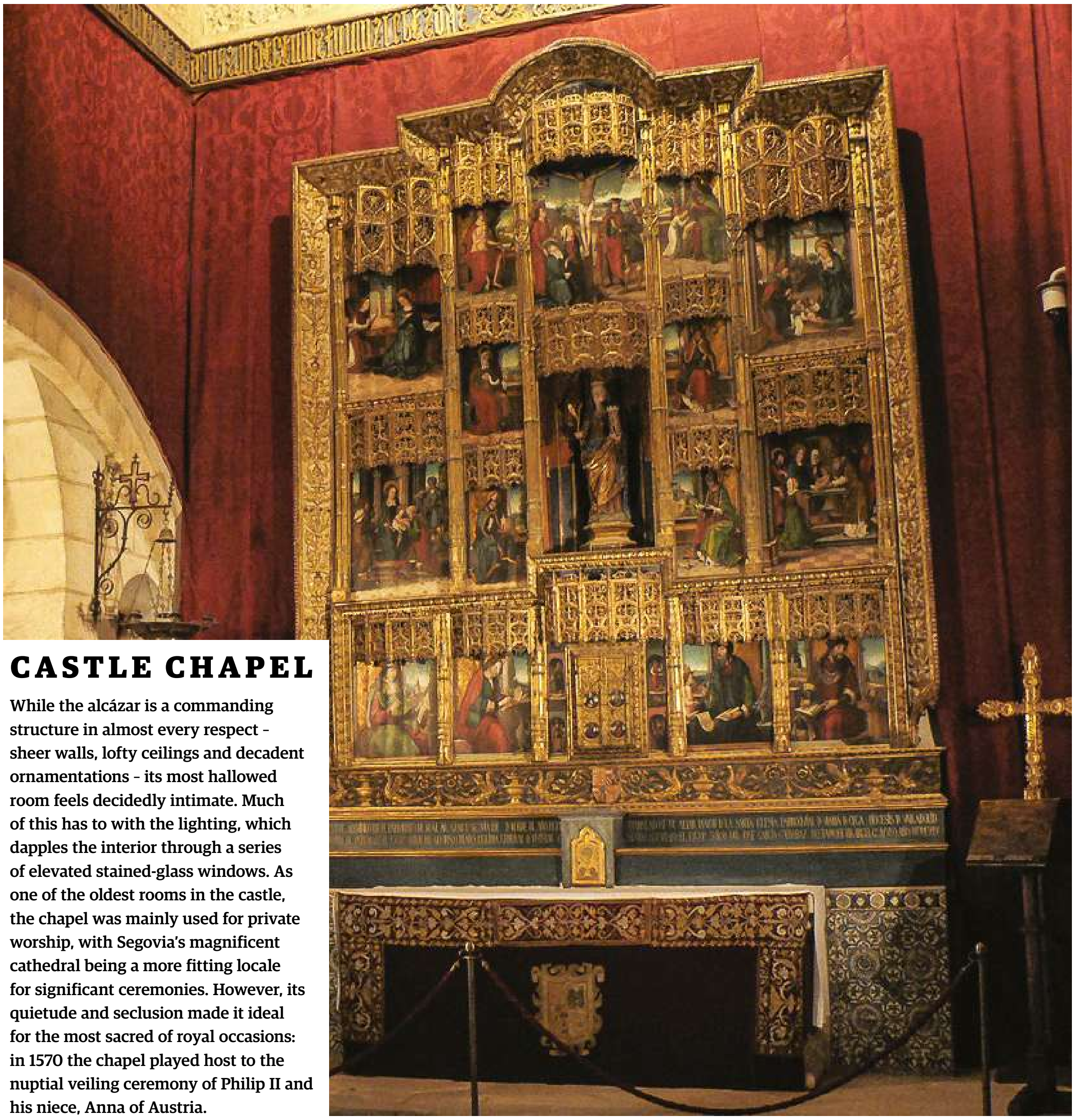
The ceilings throughout the Alcázar of Segovia are magnificent – you need only tilt your head up in almost any of the palace's halls to have your breath snatched away – but even among such lofty company, this room stands apart. The Hall of the Pine Cones (Sala de las Piñas) was another of the additions built on the orders of John II during the early 15th century, and it's not difficult to see where it gets its name. Descending from the lavishly gilded ceiling are 392 individually carved pinecones, themselves displaying a vivid golden sheen. The effect is dazzling, creating a mesmerising and slightly disorienting sense of depth.



THE AJIMECES ROOM

Wandering between rooms in the alcázar can mean jumping hundreds of years in time in just a few steps, and nowhere is that more apparent than when moving from the Galley Room to the Hall of the Ajimeces – also known as the Hall of the Old Palace.

As name suggests, the hall is one of the castle's earliest constructed rooms, dating from the 13th century and the reign of Alfonso X. Today it houses some of the museum's most treasured pieces of Medieval armour. The room's sumptuous Romanesque windows are hard to miss, though they have lost some of their lustre since the Galley Room sprang up to block their exterior view.



CASTLE CHAPEL

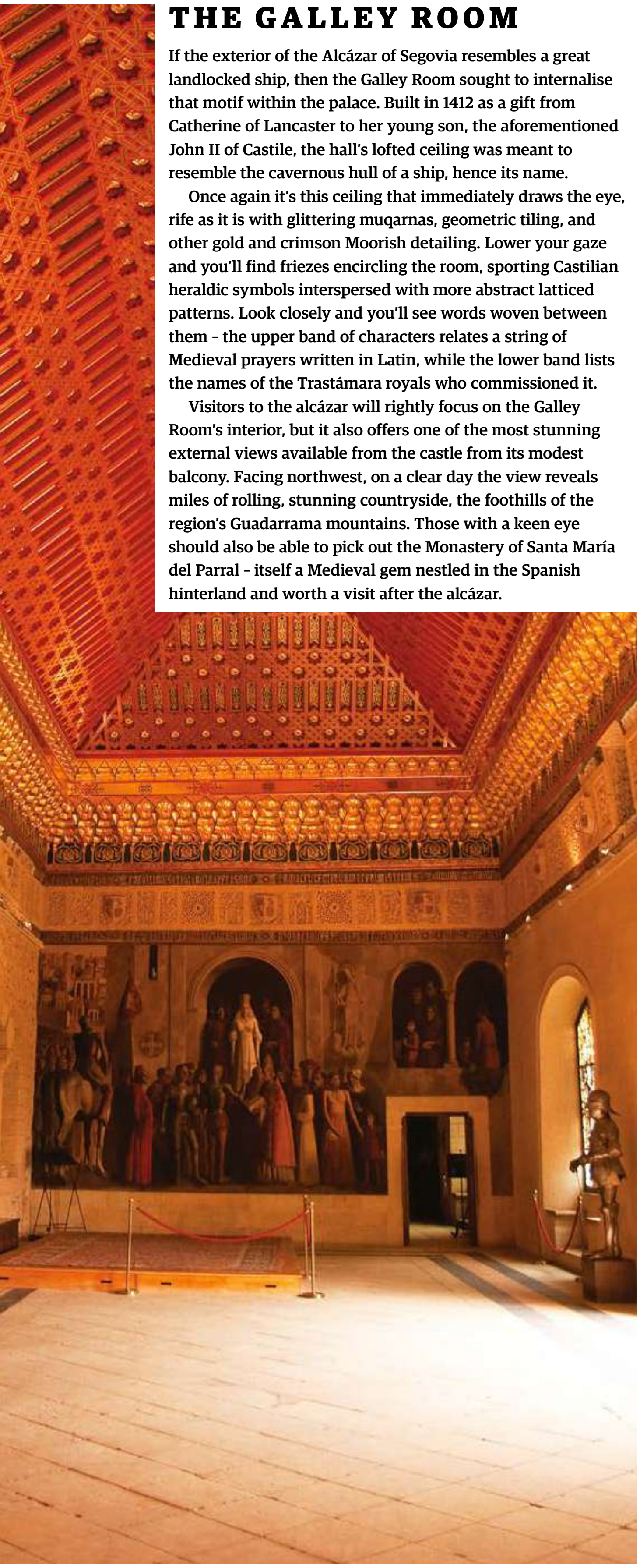
While the alcázar is a commanding structure in almost every respect – sheer walls, lofty ceilings and decadent ornamentations – its most hallowed room feels decidedly intimate. Much of this has to with the lighting, which dapples the interior through a series of elevated stained-glass windows. As one of the oldest rooms in the castle, the chapel was mainly used for private worship, with Segovia's magnificent cathedral being a more fitting locale for significant ceremonies. However, its quietude and seclusion made it ideal for the most sacred of royal occasions: in 1570 the chapel played host to the nuptial veiling ceremony of Philip II and his niece, Anna of Austria.

THE GALLEY ROOM

If the exterior of the Alcázar of Segovia resembles a great landlocked ship, then the Galley Room sought to internalise that motif within the palace. Built in 1412 as a gift from Catherine of Lancaster to her young son, the aforementioned John II of Castile, the hall's lofted ceiling was meant to resemble the cavernous hull of a ship, hence its name.

Once again it's this ceiling that immediately draws the eye, rife as it is with glittering muqarnas, geometric tiling, and other gold and crimson Moorish detailing. Lower your gaze and you'll find friezes encircling the room, sporting Castilian heraldic symbols interspersed with more abstract latticed patterns. Look closely and you'll see words woven between them – the upper band of characters relates a string of Medieval prayers written in Latin, while the lower band lists the names of the Trastámara royals who commissioned it.

Visitors to the alcázar will rightly focus on the Galley Room's interior, but it also offers one of the most stunning external views available from the castle from its modest balcony. Facing northwest, on a clear day the view reveals miles of rolling, stunning countryside, the foothills of the region's Guadarrama mountains. Those with a keen eye should also be able to pick out the Monastery of Santa María del Parral – itself a Medieval gem nestled in the Spanish hinterland and worth a visit after the alcázar.



THE OTHER ALCÁZARS

EXPLORE MORE CASTLES BUILT UNDER MOORISH RULE

NUMBER 60

REAL ALCÁZAR DE SEVILLA

The home of caliphs and kings, this alcázar has a long and rich history stretching over 1,000 years. Open every day except for 1 and 6 January, Good Friday and Christmas Day, it's a must-see for anyone visiting Seville.

61

ALCÁZAR DE LOS REYES CRISTIANOS

A beautiful complex in the heart of Córdoba, this alcázar has 55,000 square metres of gardens and rooms that have seen so much history. The Mosaics Hall even houses ancient Roman art.

62

ALCÁZAR DE JEREZ DE LA FRONTERA

At just €3, this is not to be missed with buildings dating back to the 12th century. Today you can visit the Christianised mosque and even the Dark Chamber, which is the oldest monument in the city.

63

ALCÁZAR DE COLÓN

Head to Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic to explore the home of Christopher Colombus' son. Once the meeting place of conquistadors, now it is a UNESCO World Heritage site and is waiting to be uncovered.

64

ALCÁZAR DE TOLEDO

Rising high above Toledo's skyline, this magnificent building is now home to the city's Army Museum, but it has seen kings and dictators walk within its walls in the past. Rebuilt and restored, it's certainly worth visiting.

© Shutterstock, Alamy

HUNGARIAN CASTLES

THE MAGNIFICENT CASTLES OF HUNGARY OFFER VISITORS AN UNMISSABLE CHANCE TO STEP BACK IN TIME

VAJDAHUNYAD CASTLE

ONE OF BUDAPEST'S MOST ROMANTIC FORTRESSES

BUDAPEST, HUNGARY

Right in the middle of Budapest's City Park lies Vajdahunyad Castle, a truly breathtaking example of Hungary's stunning architectural heritage. Steeped in romance, the castle grounds offer a summer boating lake and winter ice rink, as well as a wealth of antiquities and exhibitions for all to enjoy.

ENTRY FEE
ADULTS 1,100 HUF; CHILDREN 550 HUF; CONCESSIONS AVAILABLE

OPENING HOURS
TUESDAY - SUNDAY 10AM-5PM

WEBSITE
WWW.VAJDAHUNYADCASTLE.COM

65

VISEGRÁD PALACE

EXPLORE HUNGARY'S GOLDEN AGE

VISEGRÁD, HUNGARY

All that remains of what was Charles I of Hungary's magnificent palace is some extensive ruins. These ageing remains offer a tantalising glimpse of the Medieval stronghold's Gothic splendour. Visitors can spend a day exploring what remains of the citadel and enjoy one of the finest views of the Danube that Hungary can offer.

ENTRY FEE
ADULTS 1,300 HUF; REDUCED PRICE 650 HUF

OPENING HOURS
TUESDAY - SUNDAY 9AM-4PM

WEBSITE
WWW.VISITVISEGRAD.HU/EN/SIGHTS/ROYAL-PALACE

66

67

EGER CASTLE

PART OF THE FABRIC OF NORTHERN HUNGARY

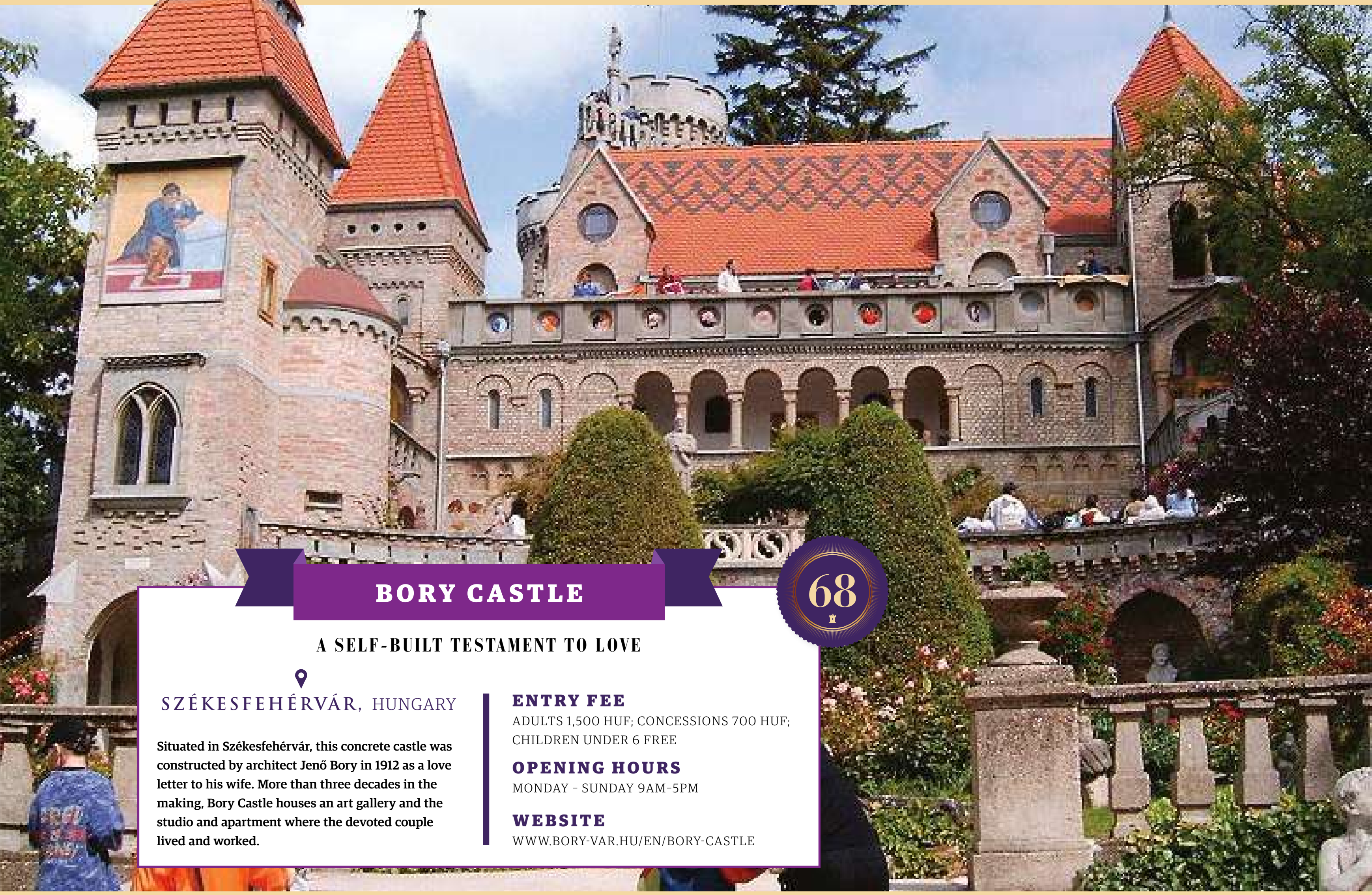
EGER, HUNGARY

The Castle of Eger is famed throughout Hungary for its part in repelling the invading Ottoman forces in the 16th century. Though much of the renowned fortress now lies in ruins, visitors to this massively popular attraction can relive the fortress's glory days through its extensive museums and even a waxwork exhibition.

ENTRY FEE
ADULTS: 1,700 HUF; CONCESSIONS 850 HUF; CHILDREN FREE

OPENING HOURS
MONDAY - SUNDAY 10AM-6PM

WEBSITE
WWW.EGRIVAR.HU/EN



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BORY CASTLE

A SELF-BUILT TESTAMENT TO LOVE

SZÉKESFEHÉRVÁR, HUNGARY

Situated in Székesfehérvár, this concrete castle was constructed by architect Jenő Bory in 1912 as a love letter to his wife. More than three decades in the making, Bory Castle houses an art gallery and the studio and apartment where the devoted couple lived and worked.

ENTRY FEE
ADULTS 1,500 HUF; CONCESSIONS 700 HUF; CHILDREN UNDER 6 FREE

OPENING HOURS
MONDAY - SUNDAY 9AM-5PM

WEBSITE
WWW.BORY-VAR.HU/EN/BORY-CASTLE

101 WORLD'S GREATEST CASTLES

BRAN CASTLE

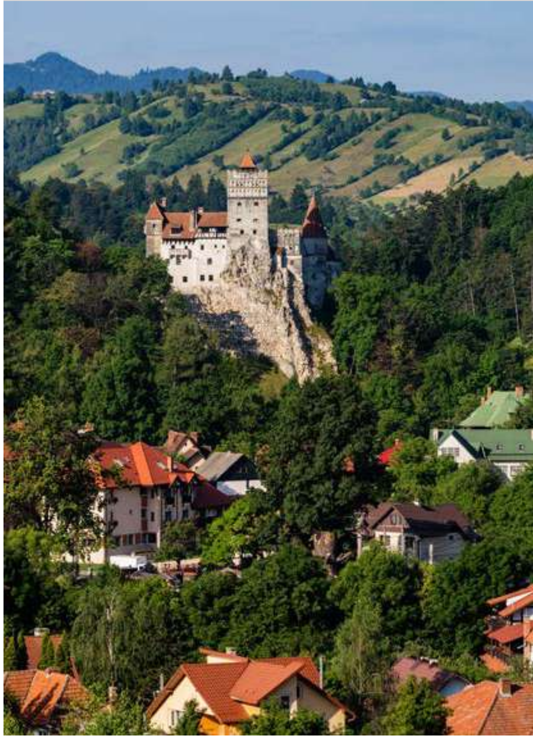
COCOONED IN THE HEART OF TRANSYLVANIA IS A MAGNIFICENT CASTLE THAT COUNT DRACULA HIMSELF WOULD BE PROUD TO CALL HOME

TRANSYLVANIA
ROMANIA

NUMBER

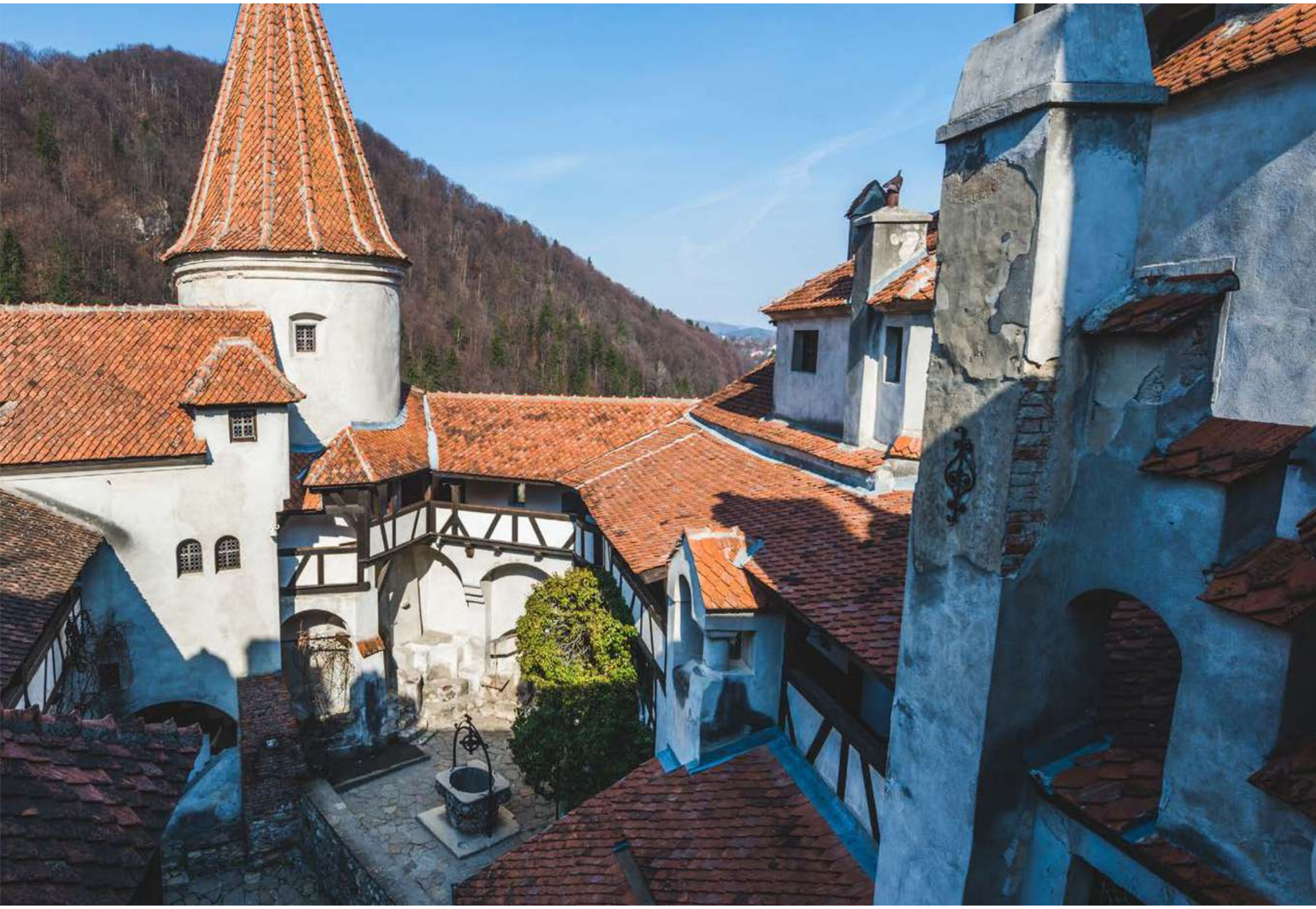
69

WORDS BY ◆ HARETH AL BUSTANI



Deep in southeastern Transylvania, amid the dark forested gorges of the Carpathian mountains, a castle roars its way over the treetops. An extension of the hill it rests on, stone juts dramatically upwards, sculpted ever more majestically into an imposing fortress, dressed in hospitable white walls and red roofs.

Here, along the border of historic Wallachia, is Bran Castle, a Medieval fortress turned royal residence, that once formed part of Hungary's bulwark against Cuman, and then Ottoman invasions. Many, however, prefer the nickname 'Dracula's Castle', believing it is the only castle in Transylvania to embody the spirit



^ **Overlooking the peaceful inner courtyard, the round tower was reconstructed during the reign of Prince Gabriel Bethlen, after a powder mill explosion and heavy storm**

of that inhabited by Bram Stoker's notorious blood-sucking count.

It is a place steeped in legend, down to its very foundation. The castle's roots were first planted in 1211, under the reign of King Andrew II of Hungary. Amid increasing incursions from the Cumans, a migratory Turkic group, he commissioned a fortress in Bran, the Slavonic word for 'gate'. He is said to have enlisted the aid of the Teutonic Knights, a religious order formed by German crusaders, for the project before they were driven away from the region in 1226.

In the 14th century, eager to better fortify its borders, the Hungarian crown began weaving a web of fortresses to defend against the neighbouring realm of Wallachia, and later the Ottomans. Sparking off the Transylvanian golden age of Medieval construction, Louis the Great gifted the residents of Brașov the former Teutonic stronghold, and tasked the local Saxons with building a worthy fortress. These fortifications, along with the ungovernable Carpathians, proved enough of a deterrent to would-be invaders, and the castle soon flourished as a customs centre. After a spectacular victory over the Wallachians, the fortress was charged with protecting the villages of Burzenland, and given the right to exploit its resources. Its garrison, meanwhile, consisted of an eclectic mix of a few dozen "English brigands and ballista soldiers", captained by a Saxon commander.

The castle retains an uncanny array of architectural gems, such as the round tower – a conical roofed corner, buttressed by a quiet courtyard. Having endured an explosion in the powder mill and severe damage due to a storm, the round tower was among various features reconstructed during the reign of the 17th-century prince Gabriel Bethlen. So too was the donjon, the inner keep, towering high over the rest of the castle's peaks and cones. In some places, the white facade gives way to brick and stone, which is symbolic of the various roles the fortress has served and the many facelifts it has undergone.

ENTRY FEE
ADULTS 40 LEI; OVER 65S 30 LEI; STUDENTS 25 LEI; PUPILS 10 LEI
OPENING HOURS
APRIL – SEPTEMBER MONDAY 12-6PM, TUESDAY – SUNDAY 9AM-6PM;
OCTOBER – MARCH MONDAY 12-4PM, TUESDAY – SUNDAY 9AM-4PM
WEBSITE
WWW.BRAN-CASTLE.COM

In the 15th century, the locals of Brașov began leasing the castle and its custom duties from the cash-starved Hungarian crown. The takeover brought in additional income from a variety of sources, ranging from beverages, gypsies, beehives, pigs and millers. They channelled these funds into building a central tower and dungeon, while doubling the size of the eastern tower, raising the enclosure wall and creating two rows of ramparts. Two of their subtlest, yet most enduring, innovations were the replacement of roofing shingles with tiles, and the erection of double-armed columns. Like a journey into the pits of Count Dracula's derelict castle, down a narrow staircase is another curiosity built by the local Saxons – the castle's cobwebbed dungeon. Having survived numerous lieges; from the Hungarians to the Ottomans, the dungeon remains intact.

However, the modern castle bears none of the scars of its previous trauma, which include the 1848 revolution and Russo-Turkish war of 1877. When the locals gifted it to Romania's Queen Marie in 1920, her Czech architect transformed it from a gritty fortress into a summer residence – moving her children Nicolae and Ileana there ten years later. Softening the castle's demeanour, Marie converted the shooting orifices into windows and gave the fireplaces modern chimneys, while adding two towers with staircases. Removing one of the fireplaces, she even discovered a secret staircase linking two of the floors. The narrow, stone corridor can still be explored to this day, providing a glimpse into the very real dangers the castle once faced.

The legacy of the royal tenure can still be enjoyed today, with the English Park surrounding the castle grounds – built to appease the English-born queen – complete with quiet ponds and structures. Among its treasures is the wooden Tea House and Ileana's quaint, yet regal, annex. The gardens provide a remarkable vantage point of the castle, accessed via a dark wooden arched door. Inside, trees cling to the wall of the inner courtyard, dressed in stone. A wishing well is another of the family's heirlooms. Originally used as the castle's main source of water, it was accompanied by a turbine power plant, which supplied electricity to the fortress and the communities of Bran, Șimon and Moieciu.

Queen Marie also reimagined the castle's interior, maintaining its brooding features but lending them an air of hospitality. Her and her family members enjoyed sweeping apartments, decorated in treasures collected from across the country. Today, the castle is a veritable museum – with bedrooms, dining rooms, parlours and hallways dressed in fine art, sculptures and objets d'art. The furniture, meanwhile, drips with antiquity, with a deep wood grandfather clock ticking alongside intricately carved doors, complete with masterfully crafted knockers.

In King Ferdinand's dining room, lions are carved into armchairs, while elsewhere little wooden men hold cabinets atop their heads. An elaborate library is a booklover's, and a woodworker's, dream, dressed head to toe in wooden panelling with a white ceiling suspended over thick wooden beams. The canopy bed, literally fit for a queen, is perhaps the interior tour de force – with a detailed frame and intricately carved pillars spiralling upwards into a pair of crowns. Elsewhere, a period stove offers insight into the 19th-century kitchen, with tiles decorated with animals.

^
Queen Marie converted the fortress into a summer residence, creating a "a small museum full of rare treasures"

It's hard to think of Transylvania without thinking of Dracula, a character inspired by real people

The castle is also festooned in hallmarks of its former military glory, with full suits of armour glistening alongside swords, bardiches, halberds and other medieval weapons. Once again, in subtle contrast to this is a jewelled crown, lavished in gold and precious stones.

Queen Marie held a special place in her heart for the castle, and its grounds created jobs for residents from the surrounding villages. Shortly before she died, at 62 years old, Marie left the castle to Ileana, who recalled: "Among other visible symbols of her love, delicacy and understanding, which are so rare even between a mother and her daughter, my mother left to me the charming Bran Castle, which we both loved so much; the sapphire and diamond crusted diadem, which made it possible for me to start a new life for my children; and an ermine cape that covers my bed during the cold nights".

When, in 1937, Marie began to struggle navigating the residence's five storeys, Princess Ileana installed an elevator, leading out of the park grounds. Today, the elevator has been converted into a multimedia exhibit, called the Time Tunnel. Developed by a multidisciplinary team of 100 people, the experience takes visitors through the site's history.

The castle's most magnificent memento, however, lies not within its bowels, but among its grounds, so carefully curated by Marie. Originally taken to her church in Balchik, the queen's heart was placed in an octagonal silver case, wrapped in the Romanian and English flags and then sealed in a box, decorated in silver, platinum and precious stones. This was finally placed in a white marble urn, which, after Balchik was handed to Bulgaria, was brought to Bran. Ileana recalled: "I then placed it in our little wooden church. Later, a chapel was excavated right into the cliff behind the church. A tangled staircase leads to it. I then placed the case containing the heart there. There, she remains aside, alone; a relic easily accessible to everybody." Today the chapel can be seen along the edge of the forest; fitting, for a queen who reserved such a special place in her heart for Bran.

Bran often hosts special events, ranging from wonderfully atmospheric jazz nights with mesmerising acoustics, to exhibits of torture devices, both sure to send shivers down spines. At its feet is the quaint Casa de ceai restaurant, serving traditional Romanian fare with modern flair. It features an array of dishes conjured up in local villages, developed for noble palettes, and perfected with forest garnishes. From pork schnitzel in an almond crust with apple jam, to a simple mushroom, onion and vegetable tart, the ingredients are sourced locally and served fresh.

Guests can also sample the Romanian dessert coliva, which pairs a base of boiled wheat with a delicious array of toppings; lemon peel, vanilla, cinnamon, icing sugar and even sweets. Drawing parallels between the cyclical cultivation of wheat grain and the Resurrection of Christ, the dish is symbolic of rebirth – a fitting tribute to a castle that has undergone ego-death, only to reinvent itself time and again.

THE REAL COUNT DRACULA

THE WORLD'S MOST FAMOUS VAMPIRE WAS INSPIRED BY TWO REAL 'MONSTERS', WHO UNLEASHED HORRORS UPON TRANSYLVANIA

The forested mountains of Transylvania were first thrust into popular culture by Bram Stoker's 1897 novel *Dracula*, about a vampire living in a crumbling castle overlooking the Carpathian mountains. Bran so encapsulates Stoker's castle that some have speculated he may have based his own fictional fortress on an illustration of it. Dracula himself, meanwhile, bears uncanny similarities with the Wallachian leader, Vlad 'the Impaler' Tepes, who ruled three times between 1448 and 1476.

Vlad rose to power after his brother and father, Vlad 'the Dragon' Dracul, were killed. When the Transylvanian Saxons began harbouring his enemies, Vlad sent an army to punish Brașov, massacring hundreds, burning crops and impaling his prisoners on spikes next to Saint Jacob's Chapel. His cruelty fuelled a Hungarian propaganda campaign, alleging he killed cripples, nailed hats to people's heads and cannibalised the dead. In 1462, while fleeing from an enormous Ottoman army, he famously left a message; impaling tens of thousands of men, women and babies – a sight so ghastly, it supposedly sent the invaders scurrying back home.

Stoker also drew upon Elizabeth Báthory, a Hungarian noblewoman who lived in Transylvania 150 years after Vlad. The most prolific female serial killer of all time, she was said to bathe in the blood of victims, believing it would make her immortal.

PLACES TO EXPLORE

AFRICAN CASTLES

UNCOVER THE HISTORIC STRONGHOLDS ON THIS STUNNING CONTINENT

FORT JESUS

A SPRAWLING SQUARE RENAISSANCE FORTRESS WITH A HUMAN TOUCH

MOMBASA ISLAND, KENYA

Now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the imposing and maze-like Fort Jesus is Mombasa Island's most popular tourist attraction. Built in a Renaissance style by the Portuguese between 1593 and 1596, it guarded the coastal city's port, although it was captured by Oman Arabs in 1698 and became a government prison in 1895 when the British protectorate was proclaimed. From above, the fortress bears a human shape and within you can still see the sultan's home - the Oman House - as well as an open water cistern, a deep well, a church, chambers, ammunition store and passages of arches. There is also a museum that contains archaeological finds in addition to a curious replica of a human skeleton found during excavations in 1990.

ENTRY FEE
1200 KENYAN SHILLING

OPENING HOURS
8AM-6PM

WEBSITE
WHC.UNESCO.ORG/EN/LIST/1295

NUMBER 71

THE CITADEL OF QAITBAY

THIS FORTRESS' FORTUNES STILL SHINES BRIGHT DESPITE A HISTORY OF BOMBARDMENT

ALEXANDRIA, EGYPT

Erected upon the exact site of the Lighthouse of Alexandria - one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World - the Citadel of Qaitbay overlooks the Mediterranean Sea and was built as a defensive fortress against the Turks by the Mamluks in the 15th century. Damaged by conflict and renovated in peacetimes, it affords fantastic views, particularly if you make it to the top of the tower. There are also some gems within, including a beautiful mosaic on the floor of the mosque.

ENTRY FEE
60 EGYPTIAN POUNDS

OPENING HOURS
8AM-4PM

WEBSITE
WWW.ALEXANDRIA.GOV.EG/ALEX/ENGLISH/QAITBAY%20FORT.HTML

Credit: wiki. ASaber91

NUMBER 72

CAPE COAST CASTLE

A TERRIBLE, DARK HISTORY UNDERPINS THIS CASTLE

CAPE COAST, GHANA

All along what was once known as the Gold Coast but is now called Ghana, a series of castles were constructed as fortified trading posts. Cape Coast Castle was one of them, first built as a wooden fortress following Swedish conquest in 1653 and then in stone following Danish dominance.

The castle would eventually be used to imprison up to 1,500 chained slaves at a time in its dark, cramped underground dungeon from where they were shipped to the New World. Meanwhile, the ruling quarters above offered great views and a lavish lifestyle – a contrast that visitors to the castle and accompanying museum cannot fail to be aware of.

Other parts were constructed after the castle fell into the hands of the first sultan of Egypt and Syria in 1187, when invaders finally managed to breach its ditches and penetrate its thick stone walls.

ENTRY FEE

40 GHANAIAN CEDI

OPENING HOURS

9AM-4.30PM

WEBSITE

WWW.GHANAMUSEUMS.ORG/CAPE-COAST-MUSEUM.PHP

NUMBER 73

CASTLE OF GOOD HOPE

AN IMPORTANT SEAT OF POWER FOR CENTURIES, THIS CASTLE HAS STOOD FIRM AND WELL PRESERVED FOR MORE THAN 350 YEARS

CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

As the oldest existing colonial building in South Africa, this 17th-century pentagonal fort built by the Dutch East India Company is now a provincial heritage site. It was once situated on the shoreline but it lies inland today due to land reclamation 80 years ago. Painted yellow to provide relief from the sun and heat, visitors can step within to enjoy its three museums: one dedicated to military history, another to the William Fehr Collection of artworks, and a ceramic exhibition called Fired. You can also embark on a guided tour, see the firing of a cannon and take in the wonderful ceremonial unlocking of the entrance, should you make it there early enough.

ENTRY FEE

50 SOUTH AFRICAN RAND

OPENING HOURS

9AM-5PM

WEBSITE

WWW.CASTLEOFGOODHOPE.CO.ZA

NUMBER 74

CITADEL OF SALAH AD-DIN

AN IMPORTANT SEAT OF GOVERNMENTAL POWER IN EGYPT FOR NEARLY 700 YEARS

CAIRO, EGYPT

Looking positively Medieval, Cairo's citadel was constructed by the first sultan of Egypt and Syria, Salah ad-Din, between 1176 and 1183. A dominant part of the city's skyline, it contains three main mosques, several museums (including a collection of Royal Carriages) and the richly-decorated Ottoman-influenced Al-Gawhara Palace, which contains a huge gilt and marble mirror and was built by governor Muhammad Ali in 1814 as a private residence for his wife. With tall towers and walls and myriad monuments, there's certainly much to explore around this UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site.

ENTRY FEE

120 EGYPTIAN POUNDS

OPENING HOURS

9AM TO 5PM

WEBSITE

WWW.EGYPT.TRAVEL/ATTRACTIONS/SALAH-EL-DIN-CITADEL-IN-CAIRO

Credit: wiki, Ahmed Al.Badawy

WAWEL CASTLE

THE IMPOSING HILLTOP PALACE THAT REMAINS THE BEATING HEART OF POLAND'S CULTURAL HERITAGE

KRAKÓW
POLAND

NUMBER

75

WORDS BY • JACK GRIFFITHS

Wawel Castle has undergone many changes over the centuries

In the centre of the Polish city of Kraków stands a 228-metre-high Jurassic limestone rock known as Wawel Hill. An imposing natural structure, as the importance of this European city grew so did the need for its defence. Initially a clutch of Romanesque buildings built in the 11th century, the spectacular foundation of Wawel Castle would become a residence for Polish kings who were both crowned and buried here.

Kraków was an important city and as a result was ravaged by Mongol hordes during the 13th century. In response, the castle was built and the city surrounded by walls, towers and gates to prevent from further invasions. The area was expanded significantly in the 14th century by Casimir III the Great, Jadwiga and Władysław II Jagiełło, and the renovation work continued with a string of halls, chambers, galleries and towers, all built in a stunning Renaissance style by a mix of Italian architects and German decorators. Further construction campaigns ensured Wawel became one of the most beautiful estates in all of Europe, as it played host to grand tournaments watched on by royalty.

Despite the gorgeous architecture on show, Wawel Castle experienced a downturn in fortunes. The royal court was relocated to Warsaw, ending a line of over 35 Polish monarchs, and now with less funding to keep the fortress in order, the castle fell into decline. Any reminder of the Renaissance was nearly completely lost in the late 18th century after the Austrians took control of Kraków. The castle was turned into military quarters and the arcaded galleries were bricked over. It was only in 1911 when the Austrian army finally left that it could be restored to its former glory and become the popular destination that it is today.

ENTRY FEE

VARIES BETWEEN EACH EXHIBITION (BETWEEN FREE AND 25 ZŁOTY)

OPENING HOURS

1 APRIL – 31 OCTOBER 10AM–5PM
1 NOVEMBER – 31 MARCH 9.30AM–4PM

WEBSITE

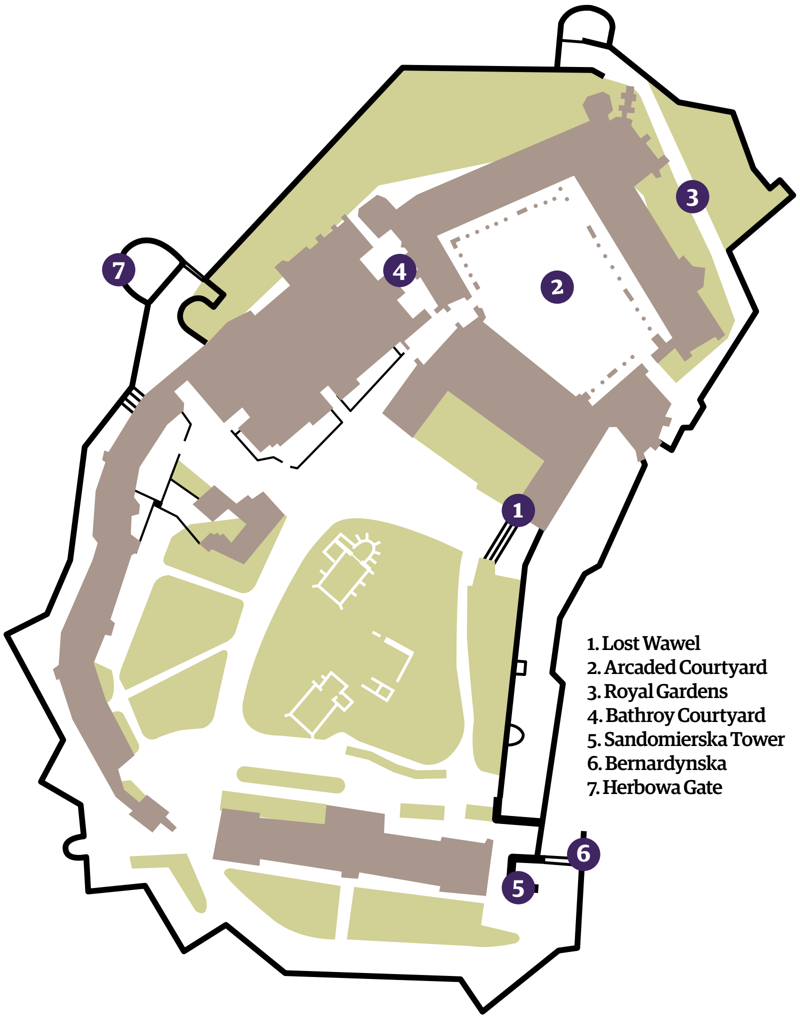
WWW.WAWEL.KRAKOW.PL/EN

A CASTLE OF FOREVER CHANGING STYLES

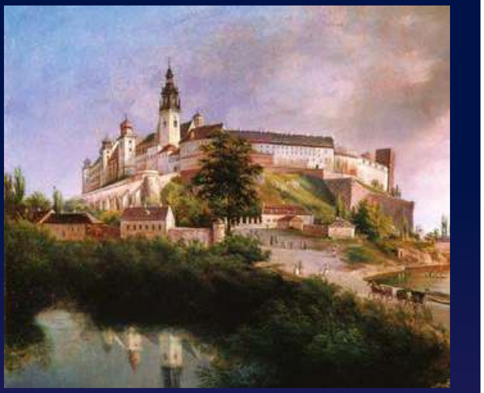
WAWEL'S MANY MONARCHS HAVE ALL BROUGHT THEIR VISION TO BEAR

Throughout its lifespan, Wawel has attracted a multitude of architects chosen specifically by each monarch to carry out their plans for the castle. Kraków is one of the oldest cities in Poland and has long been the cultural heart of the nation. Rather than being one structure, the fortress has many buildings of different eras and styles that surround a central courtyard, testament to the changing role of Wawel through the centuries. The first major expansion was in the 14th century by Ladislaus the Short and his son Casimir the Great, who established the original Gothic residence. The Polish King Sigismund I was one of the major renovators of the castle in the 16th century, and commissioned the Italian sculptor Franciscus Italus to rebuild the west and north wings of the fortress. It was built up in a Gothic style, which became a symbol of the Polish Renaissance. It survives today but within the century more extensive building works were made. Structurally, three-storey columned galleries and a curtain wall sprung up and decoratively, 194 male and female heads were carved and put on display by Sebastian Tauerbach of Wrocław along with wooden ceilings and royal portraits.

After the 1595 fire, King Sigismund III rebuilt part of the structure in an early Baroque style. The Senators' Staircase was constructed in 1599 and there was also the addition of all new fireplaces particularly in the Hall of Birds. The Corinthian columns of the fireplace hark back to the architecture of the Ancient Greeks and Romans. Throughout its rich history, Wawel Castle has been a place where talented artists and architects flocked to witness and then construct their very own pieces of Renaissance and Gothic architecture.



1. Lost Wawel
2. Arcaded Courtyard
3. Royal Gardens
4. Bathroy Courtyard
5. Sandomierska Tower
6. Bernardynska
7. Herbowa Gate



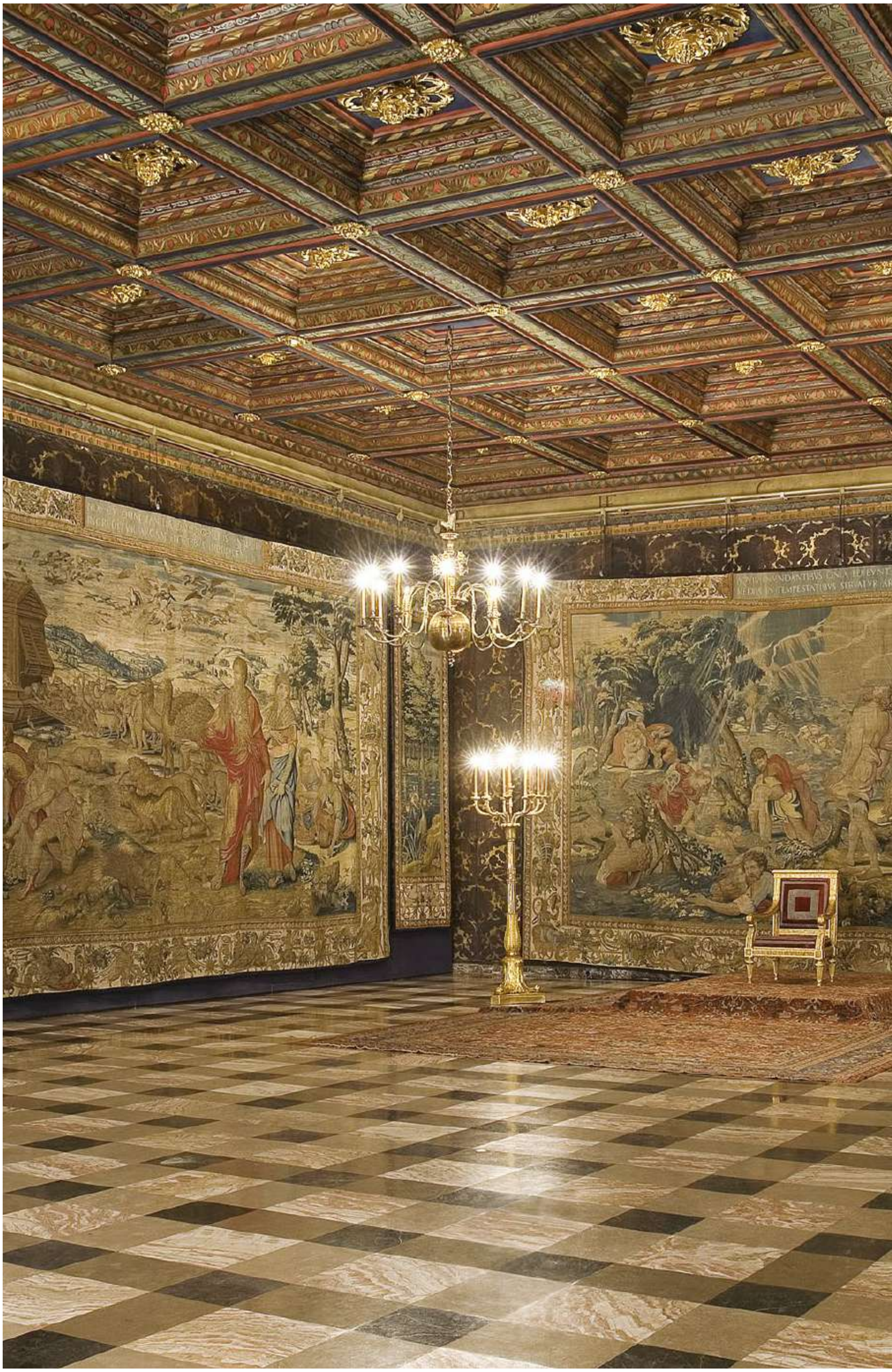
SIGISMUND I OF POLAND

THE KING WHO MADE INCREASING THE SPLENDOUR OF WAWEL HIS PERSONAL MISSION

While Wawel Castle became much more ornate under King Casimir III the Great, its architecture has been in constant flux. Many a king rebuilt and changed the layout of the castle, but perhaps most integral was Sigismund I the Old, who hired a number of famous architects to do his bidding during the 16th century. Continuing the change from Gothic to Renaissance architecture started by his brother King Alexander Jagiello, Sigismund hired Francesco Fiorentino to erect an eastern wing of the castle along with adding decorative stonework to the western bay. After Fiorentino's untimely death in 1516, Sigismund turned to Benedikt and Bartolommeo Berrecci along with other craftsmen from as far afield as Italy and Germany. One of their primary jobs was the construction of Sigismund's Chapel, a mausoleum for the king.

Even in death, Sigismund had an enduring effect on Wawel Castle. After he had passed in 1537, work continued. Italian engineers Niccolo Castiglioni and Mateo Gucci helped finish it and installed a gold-plated dome that is regarded one of the finest in northern Europe. Inside, the mausoleum is covered with mythological scenes and is a spectacle of grandeur. Perhaps the most famous part of the castle also bears the king's name: the Sigismund Tower and the bell inside. Cast out of bronze, it is a symbol of Polish nationalism and when tolled, it can be heard 30 kilometres away.

Wawel Castle owes a lot to Sigismund I and the Jagiellonian dynasty of which he was part, the arched courtyard in particular. A series of fires and changes of ruler means the efforts of Sigismund I and his many architects aren't as profoundly represented as perhaps they should be, but it was he who transformed the castle into a palace.



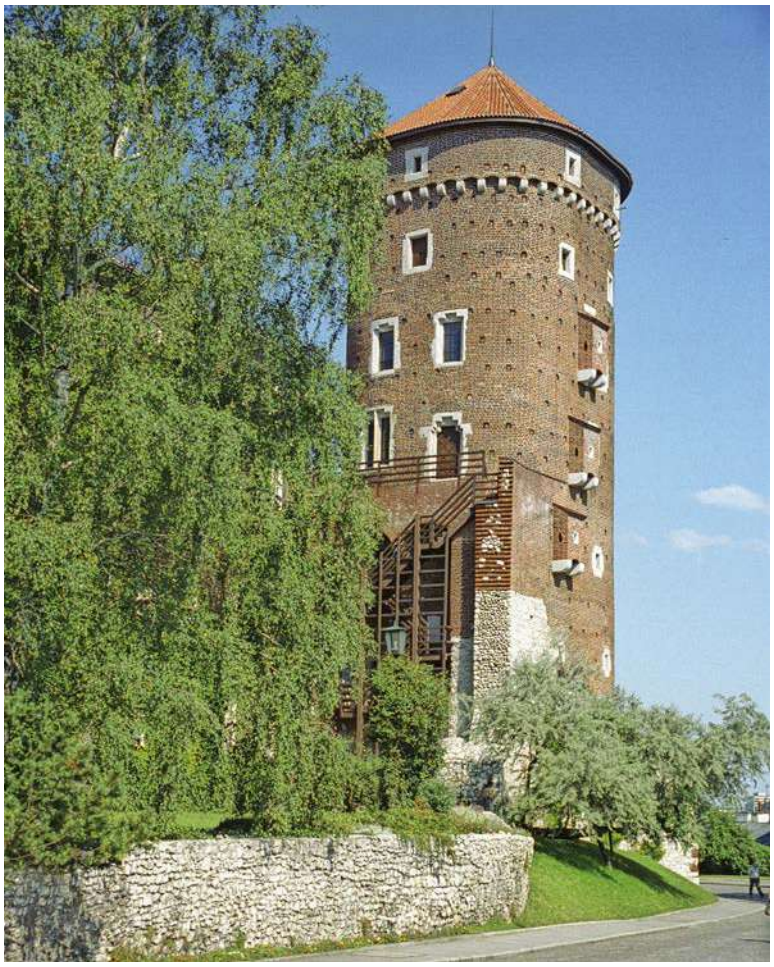
The Senators' Hall at Wawel Castle

STATE ROOMS

The main exhibition of the castle's interior spans over three floors. Three of these state rooms are on the ground floor, with one of them the residential suite of the past governors of Kraków. This room is known as the Governor's Parlour and with its larch wood ceiling, it has retained its 16th century Renaissance character. The Envoys' Stairway leads to the first floor, which plays host to private royal apartments. These rooms were damaged by fire in 1702 and again during the Austrian occupation of the 19th century. The Tournament Hall is, predictably, awash with tournament scenes painted on walls in the 1630s. Moving on, the Envoys' Room contains the 30 remaining human head woodcarvings along with a portrait of Sigismund I the Old, who was instrumental in much of the castle's growth in the Renaissance period.

Next up is the Bird Room, which is located inside a Gothic tower. The room has a rich history, which began with a fire in 1600 that forced it to be changed into an audience hall. Since then, the room has been renovated a number of times over the centuries and it contains such valuables as the busts of Roman emperors Domitian and Nerva, and portraits of King Sigismund III.

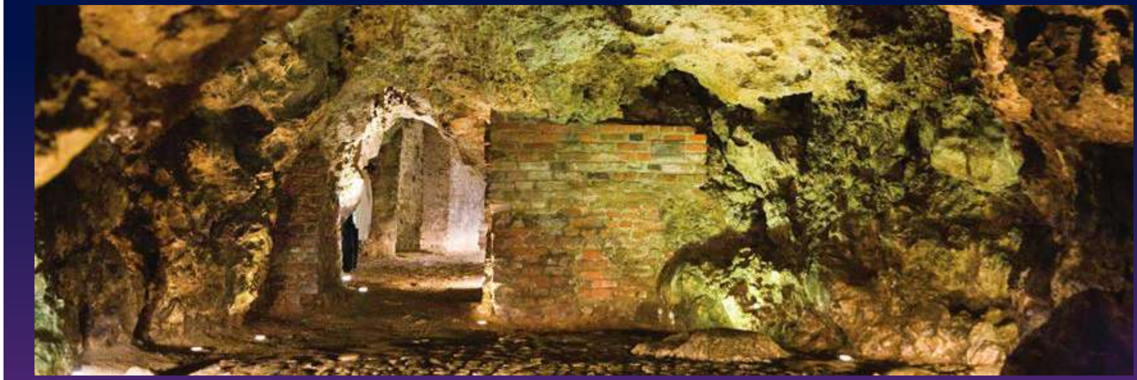
All of the aforementioned rooms are smaller than the largest room in the entire castle, the Senators' Hall. An area specifically used to hold sessions in the senate, it also held court ceremonies, royal weddings, theatre performances and balls, the most prominent of these being the marriage of Sigismund to Bona Sforza in 1518.



SANDOMIERSKA TOWER

Wawel Castle has two artillery towers nicknamed the 'fire towers'. The Sandomierska is one of them and was built by Casimir IV Jagiellon to protect what was seen as the weakest part of the entire fortification as the suburb directly outside it, Stradom, did not have any defensive walls. As well as being an artillery platform with a superb vantage point over the south of the city and the countryside beyond, Sandomierska was also built with lodgings in mind. This is shown by the glazed windows, a large chimney shaft and an ornamental entrance portal. In peacetime, the tower could also have served as guard quarters or as a prison for hostages of high importance who would have been kept locked in a small chamber on the third floor. Common criminals were consigned to an extended stay in one of the castle's dungeons.

Wawel Castle was once an immensely well-protected compound with clever use of tight-knit buildings as well as the standard towers and walls for protection. The 137-step Sandomierska Tower looms high on the hill and offers great views of the castle courtyard. Testament to its strategic importance, archaeologists discovered the remains of early Medieval timbered earth fortications consisting of banks of rubble and limestone supported by wooden beams and stakes in its cellars.



DRAGON'S DEN

The den is where the legend of the Wawel dragon originates. Tales tell of a creature that would force the city's residents to supply cattle under pain of death. The city's population resorted to deception and stuffed the cows with sulphur, suffocating the dragon with internal fire.

The Dragon's Den is accessed via the Thieves' Tower and 81 metres of its 270-metre length is now open to the public. One of the chambers within the den, known as Chamber A, was filled with water until the 19th century and served as the castle's drinking supply. A small passage leads to Chamber B, which is undoubtedly the prettiest area of the Dragon's Den. It is covered by a bricked dome that was constructed in 1830. Following Chamber B is a tunnel and sequence of corridors. First dug in 1974, it contains five small lakes but is closed the public due to its inhabitants being a rare crustacean apparently known as studniczek tatrzanski ('Tatra's welldweller'). The final area of the Dragon's Den is Chamber C, which is believed to be part of an ancient banquet room.

THE ARMOURY

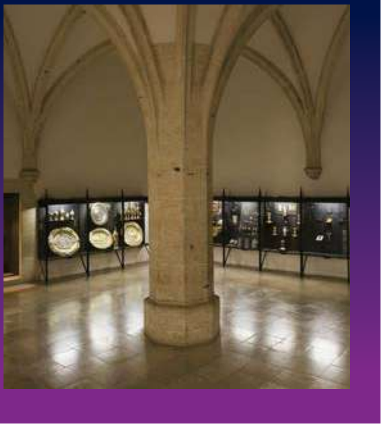
As a fortress at the contested heart of Europe, Wawel had to have a well-stocked armoury. The first room is dominated by long pikes, halberds and lances, as well as two-handed swords. These are accompanied by several coats of arms belonging to both secular and ecclesiastical rulers.

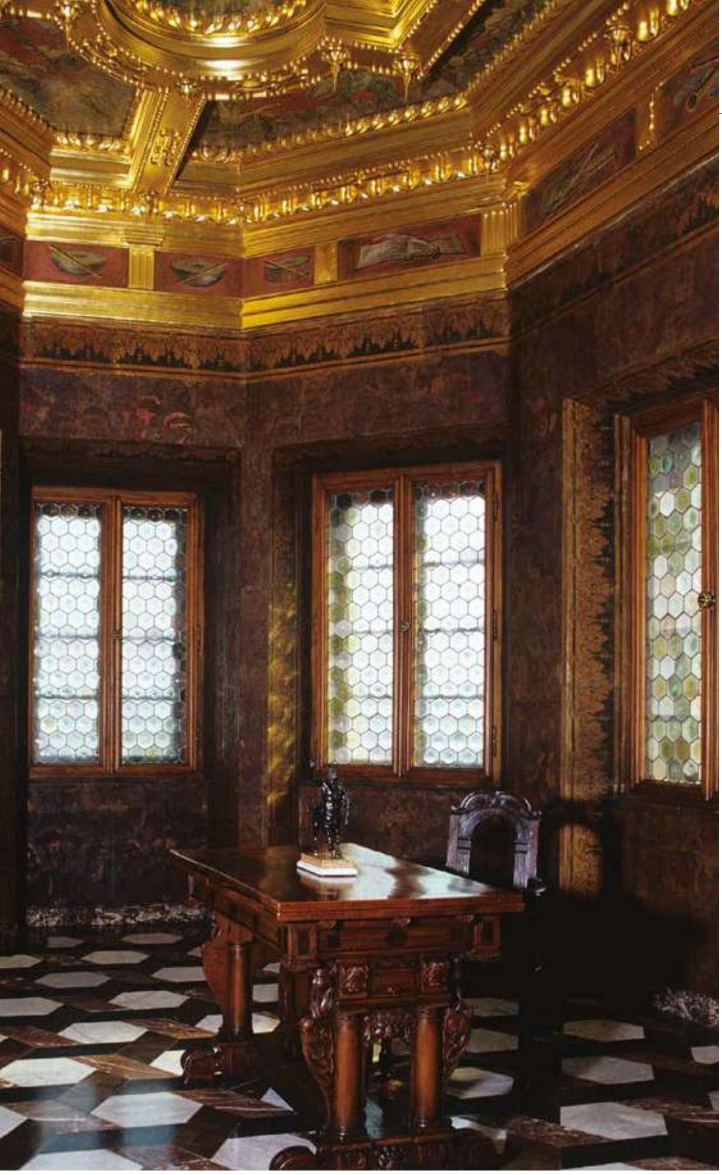
The second room contains an impressive range of armour. Plated rather than chainmail, these suits of were made for iconic Polish Hussars in the 17th century. One of the suits is even complete with 'wings', the wooden frames covered with featheres that gave them such a terrifying visage in battle. More weapons are on show in the third and final section of the armoury. The rarest blade is the unique czeczuga, a type of Armenian sabre.

One of the rooms in the Hen's Foot, in the part of Wawel Castle known as the Hen's Leg

THE TREASURY

Near to the armoury is the Crown Treasury. Now simply an exhibition, it was once a sign of the independence of the Kingdom of Poland and the subsequent Commonwealth of Two Nations between Poland and Lithuania. The Crown Treasury is most significant for its life after the 14th century when it represented the insignia of royal power at Wawel, containing crowns, sceptres, orbs, a sword, a Book of Gospels and even a special tray that was used to anoint a ruler. Sadly, the majority of the old Crown Treasury was destroyed in 1795 by an invading Prussian force that broke in and destroyed the contents of the treasury. Almost all the treasures were lost and have now been replaced by a new collection that came into being in 1930. This only hints at the past splendour of the room but does contain its own special artefacts including Szczerbiec, a legendary sword that was used to crown Polish monarchs.





ROYAL PALACE APARTMENTS

The guests of the kings of Wawel Castle were entertained in style - there were four chambers specifically allocated for them and they are a mixture of Gothic and Renaissance architecture. Two of the rooms are known as the Hen's Foot and are in the area of the castle known as the Hen's Leg. Any guest who stayed a night here would be presented with a panoramic view of Kraków's old town. It is rumoured that kings would sit here in solitude and contemplate the major issues of the day.

Fast forward a few centuries and it wouldn't be a king who sat in the Hen's Foot, but a Nazi by the name of Hans Frank. Kraków was chosen as the capital of Poland's western sector, which was ruled by the Third Reich during World War II. Frank became Governor-General of the city and used Wawel Castle as his headquarters. Frank, a flamboyant and ardent anti-Semite who made his bones as Hitler's legal adviser, arrived after occupation in a black Cadillac and let his wife Brigitte label herself as the Königin von Polen ("Queen of Poland"). His government was centred in the Hen's Foot and he had an office built for him, which is now a library. He even found time to play Ukrainian chess grandmaster Efim Bogoljubov and have an enormous bathtub constructed for himself. A huge amount of artwork was looted by the Nazis or destroyed during the war. All in all, the castle was fortunate not to be destroyed, as much of Poland was levelled during heavy, relentless bombing in the war.

Another one of the Royal Palace Apartments is the Column Hall. Predominantly a storehouse for all the silverware contained in the castle during the 16th century, two centuries later its role had changed and columns were added as it was altered into a more formal location. The columns evoke a spirit of classicism along with portraits of past Polish monarchs.

MORE HERITAGE AND HISTORY

FIND OUT WHAT ELSE POLAND HAS TO OFFER

NUMBER 76

© Jarciurus

KSIĄŻ CASTLE

Located in Wałbrzych, this castle is surrounded by the beautiful Wałbrzyski Foothills. Built in 1292, it has seen bloodshed throughout the Hussite Wars, Matthias Corvinus' campaigns and World War II. Today it's a peaceful complex, just waiting to be explored.

77

© Rafał Konieczny

CZOCHA CASTLE

After a devastating fire in the 18th century, the 500-year-old castle was all but destroyed. What stands today is a faithful restoration, and it now houses a hotel and museum. You can even attend mead-tasting events in the cellar.

78

© Paweł Wojtyczka

KWIDZYN CASTLE

The perfect destination for those who have an interest in the Teutonic Knights, Kwidzyn Castle is a well-preserved 14th-century marvel of the Order's architecture. Unapologetically Medieval, it's well worth a visit.

79

© P.R.Schreyner

GOŁUCHÓW CASTLE

While it has undergone restoration many times, Gołuchów Castle is still a sight to behold. Today it houses artworks and ancient vases, all on display for visitors to see, and it is surrounded by a beautiful landscape park.

80

© Gregy

MALBORK CASTLE

This castle's grandiosity served a purpose: Malbork was the headquarters of the Teutonic Knights for almost 150 years. Boasting a rich history, it's a must-see destination in Poland and you could easily spend hours there.

PLACES TO EXPLORE CRUSADER CASTLES

VISIT THESE SITES ACROSS THE MIDDLE EAST AND EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

NUMBER 81

BODRUM CASTLE

Fearing invasion by the Seljuk Turks, the Knights of St John stationed in Rhodes felt it necessary to construct a mainland stronghold to supplement their island base. As such, they began work on the Castle of St Petrus (as it was originally known) in the early 15th century, with German architect Heinrich Schlegelholt designing the fortification's exterior walls.

For material, workers plundered the nearby ornate yet earthquake-ravished Greek Mausoleum of Mausolus and the castle's facade was adorned with beautiful reliefs that can still be seen today. More material from the Mausoleum was used when the castle was first fortified in 1494 when the constructors sought to thicken the walls as protection against enemy cannonballs.

The multinational flavour of the castle continued when members of the Knights of St John from other countries became involved. French, German, Italian, English and Snake (or Spanish) towers created in different styles were built, decorated with carvings and coats of arms, including that of King Henry IV of England. These towers are now part of the Museum of Underwater Archaeology, which focuses on ancient shipwrecks.

ENTRY FEE

25 TURKISH LIRA

OPENING HOURS

OPEN DAILY EXCEPT MONDAYS 9AM–4.30PM

WEBSITE

WWW.BODRUM-MUSEUM.COM

NUMBER 82

SIDON SEA CASTLE

Ruined by numerous conflicts and battered by the elements, the remnants of this remarkable castle near the Port of Sidon can today only hint at its undoubted past splendour. In its heyday, it was a picturesque island fortress developed by the Crusaders from 1228 on the former site of a Phoenician Temple to defend the city's harbour.

But even with the loss of exterior decoration along its fortifications and a good number of other original features long gone, the Sidon Sea Castle continues to impress, thanks to its recycled Roman columns used as reinforcements, its fortified stone causeway and its towers East and West, the latter far better preserved and a great glimpse into the past.

Although a good chunk of the castle was destroyed by the Mamluks in 1291 for fear the Crusaders would retake it and resume their military grip on the Mediterranean coast, leader of the Mount Lebanon Emirate Fakhr-al-Din II renovated the castle in the 17th century. It was again damaged - this time by British marine bombs in 1840 - but it still remains a symbolic icon of this striking location.

ENTRY FEE

ADULTS 4,000 LEBANON POUNDS; CHILDREN UNDER 10 FREE

OPENING HOURS

OPEN DAILY 9AM - SUNSET

NUMBER 83

KERAK CASTLE

Built high on a ridge during the mid-12th century, this imposing Crusader stronghold was perfectly located to control the trade routes between Damascus, Egypt and Mecca. Positioned to the east of the Dead Sea and an early example of Frankish architecture, it was constructed on the orders of Pagan the Butler, who was lord of Oultrejordain in the Kingdom of Jerusalem and who made Kerak Castle his seat in 1142.

Renovation and excavation mean some parts are closed to visitors but, aside from the magnificent views over what became known as the Levant, there is much to see as you make your way through the castle's dimly lit maze of tiny passageways below the surface and visit the interior chambers (perhaps accompanied by a guide since there are few information panels).

The original Crusader sections can be seen mainly to the north and east of the castle, and they include the northern wall with its huge arches, a church, dungeons and corner towers, the latter added by Pagan's nephew Maurice and baron Philip of Milly.

ENTRY FEE

ADULTS 4,000 LEBANON POUNDS; CHILDREN UNDER 10 FREE

OPENING HOURS

APRIL - SEPTEMBER 8AM-7PM;
OCTOBER - MARCH 8AM-4PM

NUMBER 84

KOLOSSI CASTLE

Cyprus is something of a hotbed of Crusader castles with no fewer than nine of them, including one in the village of Kolossi. The Frankish military is understood to have initially built it in 1210 and, while only the bailey and three-storey keep remains today, it is in the vicinity of vineyards - notable since the Knights Templar nurtured these lands for a short spell in the early 14th century to produce and export a sweet wine known as Commandaria. The castle certainly has a rich history. A former military stronghold for the Knights Hospitallers, it became their Grand Commandery following the fall of Acre in 1291. It was bestowed to the Templars between 1306 and 1313, given back, and used as a residence before being rebuilt in 1454 by the Knights of the Order of St John of Jerusalem. Today, you can check out the large hall and the coats of arms carved into the walls. You can then climb to the castle top where you'll be afforded some very rewarding views.

ENTRY FEE

€2.50

OPENING HOURS

APRIL - SEPTEMBER 8.30AM-7.30PM;
OCTOBER - MARCH 8.30AM-5PM

NUMBER 85

BELVOIR FORTRESS

Israel has more Crusader castles than any other country, but Belvoir Fortress is the best preserved of them all. Located in a strategic spot to the north of Israel, construction began in 1168 on the orders of the Grand Master of the Knights Hospitaller. It was also built to a concentric design - effectively a castle within a castle. The outer wall was lower than its inner wall so that archers in the main section could peer over and fire. It was an effective defence made all the better by corner towers for added reinforcement.

Even so, the castle was destroyed. It eventually surrendered in 1189 following an 18-month siege after which it was pulled apart for fear of reconquest. When it was ceded back to the Crusaders in 1240, they lacked the funds for restoration and so the structure continued to decay.

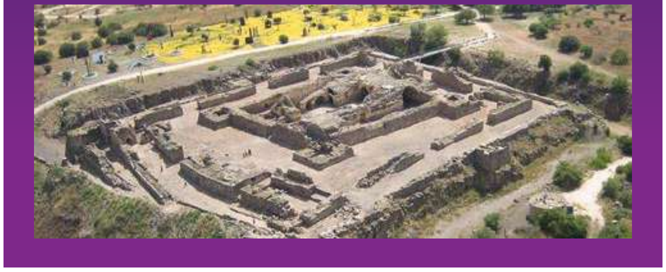
Today's castle is the result of excavation and there's lots to see from a great arch and a bridge overlooking the moat to the fortifications. It also lacks huge numbers of tourists, so you may even get the place to yourself.

ENTRY FEE

ADULTS 22 ISRAELI NEW SHEKEL; CHILDREN 10 NIS

OPENING HOURS

APRIL - SEPTEMBER 8AM-5PM;
OCTOBER - MARCH 8AM-4PM



101 WORLD'S GREATEST CASTLES

GRIPSHOLM CASTLE

AS WELL AS BOASTING ONE OF THE BEST-PRESERVED 18TH-CENTURY THEATRES, THIS CASTLE HAS A GREAT NUMBER OF PORTRAITS

MARIEFRED
SWEDEN

NUMBER

86

WORDS BY ◆ DAVID CROOKES

Built in red brick and cornered with imposing, green copper-domed towers, Gripsholm Castle, which lies on the south shore of Lake Mälaren, is one of Sweden's most popular and eye-catching structures. It was a royal residence for many centuries and a prison for a long spell. Today it serves as a museum containing some of the country's finest portraits and works of art, in addition to being a roaring curiosity.

The castle is a short stroll from the centre of the tiny town of Mariefred, which itself is an elegant and picturesque destination, home to just 3,726 inhabitants. It dominates the area, as befitting one of Sweden's national symbols, and as you cross the wooden drawbridge, walk under the archway and enter the castle's gorgeous grounds, you're instantly able to gain an up-close sense of its undoubted grandeur before learning of its chequered past.

What you see today is symptomatic of the castle's changing use over the centuries, which is why it appears at first glance to be a collection of dissimilar connected buildings from certain angles. It was originally constructed as a fortified castle in the 1370s by the head of the royal council and governor of the valley of Lake Mälaren, Bo Jonsson Grip - whose name was lent to the castle. The hope was that it would help to protect the western approaches to Stockholm given the ongoing threats of invasion from Denmark and Norway, although for much of its time there was actually great peace.

Grip was a powerful man and he controlled a dozen such fortresses across a vast swathe of land, which also encompassed the entirety of Finland. However, some time after his death, the castle was sold in 1404 to Queen Margaret, founder of the Kalmar Union, which joined the kingdoms of Denmark, Sweden and Norway. In 1472, the Swedish statesman Sten Sture the Elder acquired the castle and it ended up functioning as a convent for males of the order of the Carthusians for close to 30 years from 1498, until King Gustav Vasa got it in 1526.

Gustav I made the first big changes to the castle - although that is something of an understatement. Indeed, in 1537 he ordered it be demolished and rebuilt, asking for it to be fashioned in the Renaissance architectural style under the direction of master-builder Henrik von Köllen, a process that took eight years to complete. Although only the facade of a wall from the original Medieval fortress remains, von Köllen nevertheless ensured the new castle and its rooms were suitably opulent and fit for a king since it was to become one of the royal house's main residences. Of von Köllen's intricate interior work, however, only a painted ceiling in the sizeable Hall of State remains, yet it gives a good idea of the care and attention that he had his team lavish upon the castle.

His work made it hugely attractive to the monarchy and, as visitors make their way through the winding passageways, they effectively take a journey through time and experience life for those in the upper sections of society. That said, it was in this castle where King Eric XIV imprisoned brother John and his consort Catherine Jagiellon between 1563 and 1567 and where the king himself was kept prisoner for three years from 1571 after John deposed him and seized the throne in 1569. Conditions, however, were far from tough.

John's brother, Duke Charles, had a bedchamber in the castle, and it remains one of Sweden's best preserved interiors. Almost untouched and adorned with original furniture from the 1570s, the wood-panelled walls and the ceiling above the built-in bed are decorated with artworks. There's also a green bench running along some of the walls and a painted floral display stretching high across the upper part of the room, dating back to 1573. It's hard

ENTRY FEE
130 SWEDISH KRONA
OPENING HOURS
10AM–4PM, ALTHOUGH MORE RESTRICTED HOURS DURING WINTER
WEBSITE
WWW.KUNGLIGASLOTTEN.SE/ENGLISH/ROYAL-PALACES-AND-SITES/GRIPSHOLM-CASTLE.HTML

The outside of the castle hints at the various purposes it has served over the years

The entrance to the castle is the first step in discovering more about this intriguing building

not to tingle with the sense of history when paying it a visit, even though for the sake of preservation you have to understandably view the treasure from behind a partition.

During the 17th century, the castle was part of a dower granted to Queen Maria Eleonora, the widow of Gustav II Adolf and, later, to Queen Hedvig Eleonora. Of the two, Hedvig did more to alter the castle, adding the Queen's Wing in 1691. After it was used as a prison for a good number of years during the 18th century, however, King Gustav III decided to renovate since he intended to spend a lot of time at the castle. He had grand plans for the building - some of which never managed to come to fruition - but it was during his time that one of its most notable developments was constructed: the jaw-dropping Gripsholm Theatre, which took shape around 1781.

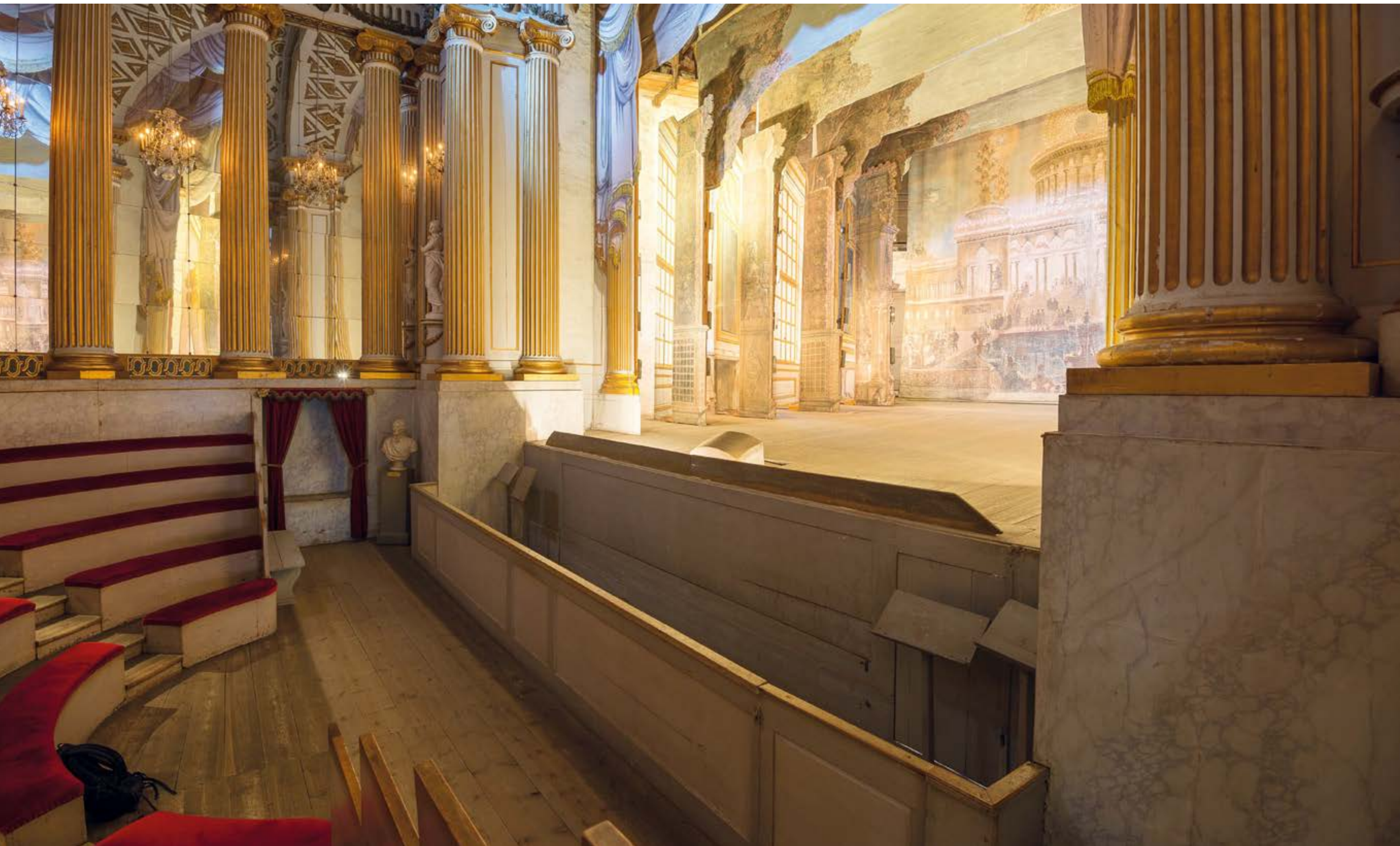
It really has to be seen to be fully appreciated, with the theatre-loving king and budding thespian commissioning a splendid stage for his personal enjoyment, even though it was his second attempt. An original theatre had been devised by architect Carl Fredrik Adelcrantz in 1772 but Gustav III believed it to be too small. The second was designed by Swedish architect Erik Palmstedt, who drew inspiration from the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza, Italy.

The well-equipped theatre was created within one of the round towers and the Neoclassical amphitheatre had a ring of 60 seats that were reserved for selected guests, in addition to space for servants to observe in the dome. The final performance was of a play called *Drottning Christina* in 1785, and the set remains intact along with the original and sophisticated stage machinery beneath the stage. It's thrilling to be able to see how well preserved it is.

King Gustav III also sought to lay his mark on the castle with the creation of his Round Salon, the walls of which were adorned with large portraits of himself and his contemporaries in between the huge recessed windows and set around a sweeping wooden, decorative floor. After Gustav III was assassinated in

"VISIT THE ROOMS AND STEEP YOURSELF IN HISTORY"

Even to this day, the theatre retains the set of the final play ever to be performed there, from 1785



1792, he was succeeded by Gustav IV Adolf who ended up being imprisoned in the castle for nine months. He eventually abdicated in 1809 and signed his intention to step down in the castle. Visitors can see the ivory, pearl and tortoiseshell-topped desk he used for this purpose in the castle's Council Chamber.

By 1822, the castle was thrown open to the people as the National Portrait Gallery and it continues to hold one of the world's oldest collections of art. Managed by Nationalmuseum, you can enjoy more than 5,000 portraits today with every Swedish king or queen on display as well as a host of famous Swedes.

You can visit the grand rooms, steep yourself in history and check out notable gems such as the Westphalian Gallery, where the walls are filled with 70 portraits of those who sought to negotiate peace in the 1640s. It has also become tradition for the Gripsholm Association to commission and donate a portrait of a prominent Swede and these include those of ABBA's Benny Anderson, the director, writer and producer Ingmar Bergman, and Astrid Lindgren, the Swedish writer of fiction and screenplays. In 2019, professor and designer Ingegerd Råman was added.

Not that its current time as a gallery has been without controversy, however. Between 1889 and 1894, a number of the alterations made in the 17th and 18th centuries were removed on the orders of architect Fredrik Lilljekvist who wanted, as far as he could, to restore the castle to its original 16th-century state. Such a bid to revive its Renaissance spirit saw previous details recreated and additions made such as new Renaissance décor on walls of the inner courtyard. A third floor was also created but unfortunately the work wasn't very well received. Author Verner von Heidenstam was particularly damning and he called all such changes that were made "forgeries of history".

Still, that work is now firmly part of the castle's rollercoaster history and it does at least give visitors an opportunity to see the state rooms and apartments looking similar to how they would have been decorated back in the Renaissance period. Art and furniture from other royal residences from that time have been moved to Gripsholm Castle to add greater authenticity. It is, therefore, a superb opportunity to view different Swedish styles all in one place, with the history of the various objects spanning a good 400 years.

In fact, the castle has become a focal point for Sweden's royal history given its immense character, and while the Swedish monarchy do not make use of Gripsholm Castle these days, it is so easy to lose yourself around the structures and grounds for a day, perhaps visiting the royal deer at the Hjorthagen Nature Reserve or stopping to check out the Viking memorial runestones outside the main entrance. One was discovered in 1730 and moved to its current location in 1926. It's yet another slice of history in this truly amazing area.

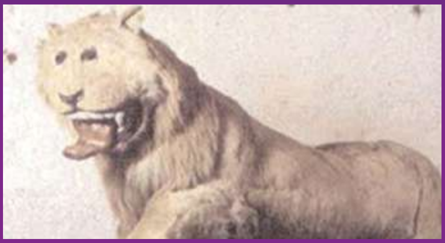
THE LION OF GRIPSHOLM CASTLE

WHEN A KING'S LION DIED AND WAS SENT TO BE STUFFED, IT BECAME CLEAR THE TAXIDERMIST HAD NEVER SEEN SUCH AN ANIMAL

Don't worry: there is a lion at Gripsholm Castle, but the only roar you are likely to hear is that of hearty laughter. After all, what other reaction could there possibly be when you see the work of the taxidermist tasked with stuffing this big cat for King Frederick I of Sweden following its death in the early 18th century?

The king had been presented with the lion by the Bey of Algiers in 1731 and it was kept in a cage in a Royal Game Park on the island of Djurgården in the centre of Stockholm. Unfortunately, the taxidermist had never seen a live lion and he only had the pelt and some bones to play around with.

Cue a laughable interpretation of what he assumed the animal looked like - adorning it with a comical face, eyes that appear to glance to its right and a tongue extending cheekily, far from its mouth. From the side it doesn't look all that bad but it's certainly a highlight of any visit to Gripsholm Castle, where the mounted animal continues to be on display, much to the great delight of anyone who sets eyes on it.



Duke Charles' chamber remains in its original state from 1570

CASTELLI D'ITALIA

EXPLORE THE BEST THAT ITALY HAS TO OFFER

CASTELLO DI MIRAMARE

87

A CASTLE FIT FOR A FUTURE EMPEROR

TRIESTE, ITALY

On a little bit of land jutting out into the Gulf of Trieste lies Castello di Miramre, a 19th-century neo-Gothic castle that was once home to Archduke Maximilian of Austria, who later became emperor of Mexico. Here you can explore the opulence of the royal including a red silk-lined throne room, ornate oriental-style salons and 22 hectares of landscaped gardens filled to the brim with rare and exotic trees.

ENTRY FEE ADULT €8; REDUCED €2

OPENING HOURS 9AM-7PM

WEBSITE
WWW.MIRAMARE.BENICULTURALI.IT

CASTELLO ORSINI-ODESCALCHI

88

HUNDREDS OF YEARS OF HISTORY IN ONE CASTLE

LAZIO, ITALY

It's a castle so beautiful that it has been a wedding venue for the rich and famous, so why not lap up some of the magic with a stroll around Castello Orsini-Odescalchi? While guided tours are included in the ticket price on weekends and holidays, it's still a treat to explore on your own.

Less than an hour's drive from both Civitavecchia and Rome, here you can uncover centuries of Italian history in just one fortress. Make your way through grand reception rooms and gaze in awe at astounding frescoes before you head to the hanging gardens to enjoy fantastic views of the nearby Lake Bracciano.

ENTRY FEE
GENERAL €8.50; REDUCED €6

OPENING HOURS
10AM-5, 6 OR 7PM (CHECK WEBSITE)

WEBSITE
WWW.ODESCALCHI.IT/EN

89

CASTELLO ESTENSE

A BEAUTIFUL BUILDING NEAR BOLOGNA

FERRARA, ITALY

Built out of fear of irate townsmen in the late 1300s, Castello Estense had become the home of the Este family by the late 15th century. Located in the centre of the town of Ferrara, not far from the beautiful city of Bologna, the building is now used as government offices - but some of it is still open to the public.

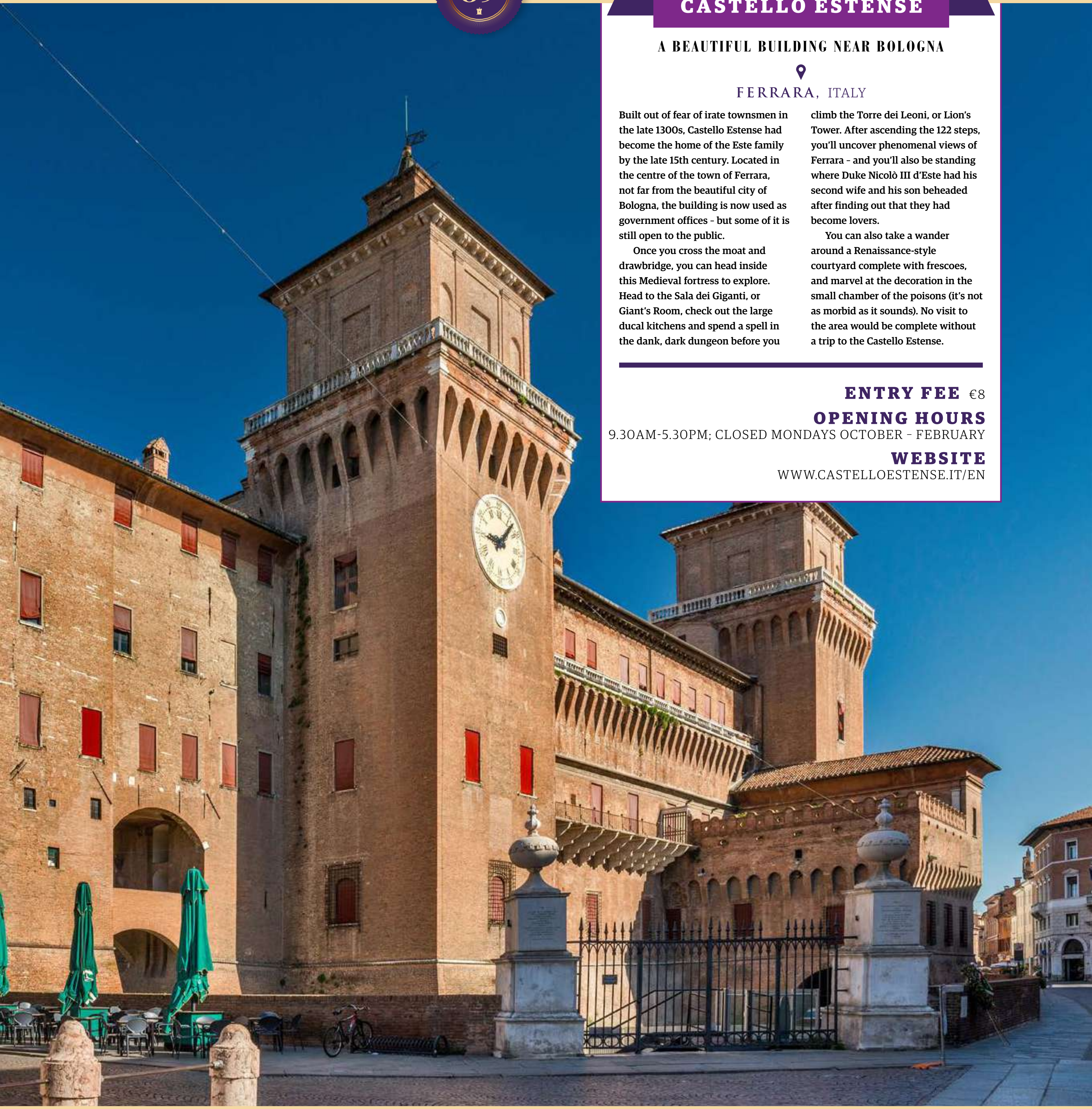
Once you cross the moat and drawbridge, you can head inside this Medieval fortress to explore. Head to the Sala dei Giganti, or Giant's Room, check out the large ducal kitchens and spend a spell in the dank, dark dungeon before you climb the Torre dei Leoni, or Lion's Tower. After ascending the 122 steps, you'll uncover phenomenal views of Ferrara - and you'll also be standing where Duke Nicolò III d'Este had his second wife and his son beheaded after finding out that they had become lovers.

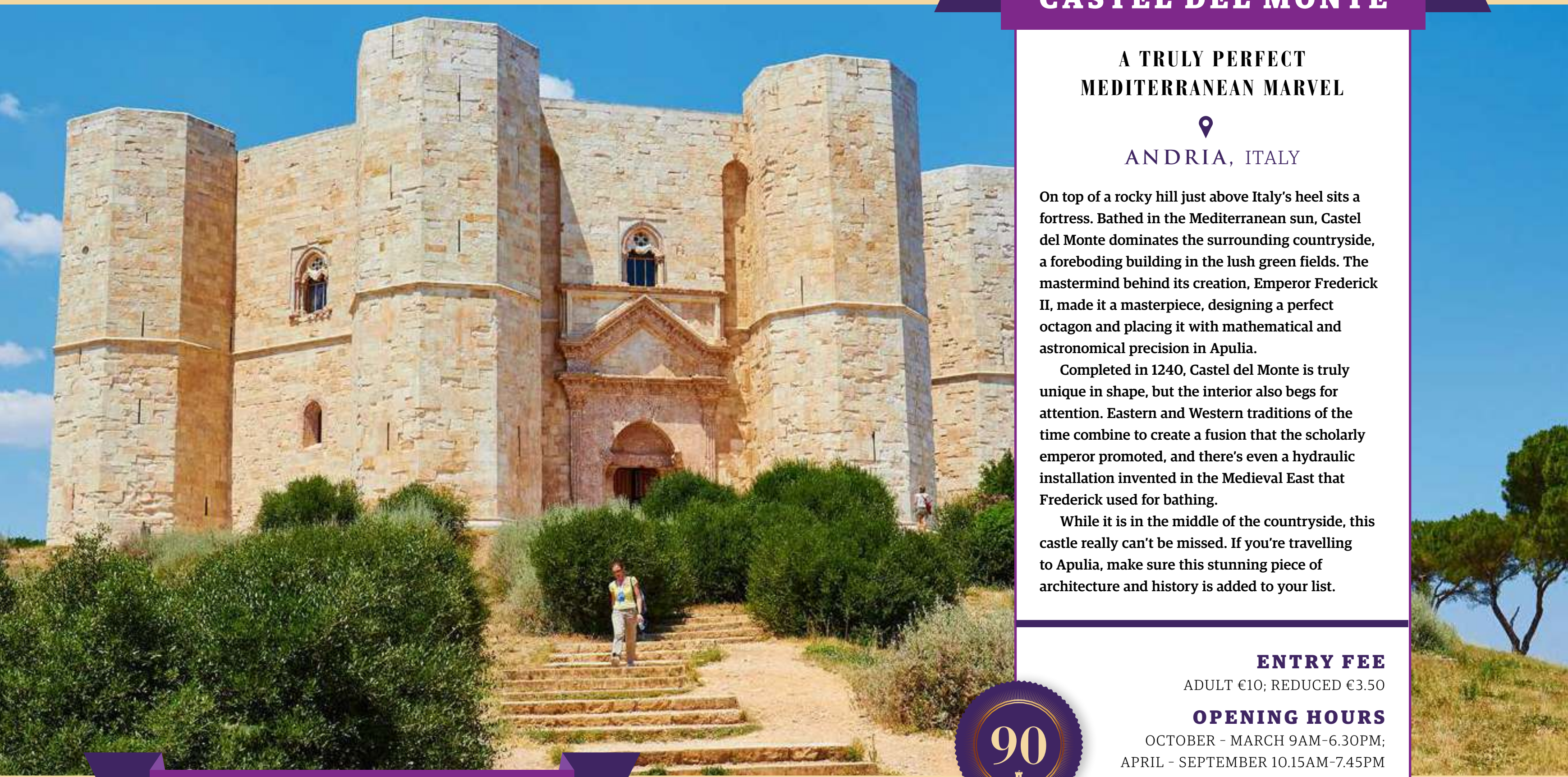
You can also take a wander around a Renaissance-style courtyard complete with frescoes, and marvel at the decoration in the small chamber of the poisons (it's not as morbid as it sounds). No visit to the area would be complete without a trip to the Castello Estense.

ENTRY FEE €8

OPENING HOURS
9.30AM-5.30PM; CLOSED MONDAYS OCTOBER - FEBRUARY

WEBSITE
WWW.CASTELLOESTENSE.IT/EN





CASTEL DEL MONTE

A TRULY PERFECT MEDITERRANEAN MARVEL

ANDRIA, ITALY

On top of a rocky hill just above Italy's heel sits a fortress. Bathed in the Mediterranean sun, Castel del Monte dominates the surrounding countryside, a foreboding building in the lush green fields. The mastermind behind its creation, Emperor Frederick II, made it a masterpiece, designing a perfect octagon and placing it with mathematical and astronomical precision in Apulia.

Completed in 1240, Castel del Monte is truly unique in shape, but the interior also begs for attention. Eastern and Western traditions of the time combine to create a fusion that the scholarly emperor promoted, and there's even a hydraulic installation invented in the Medieval East that Frederick used for bathing.

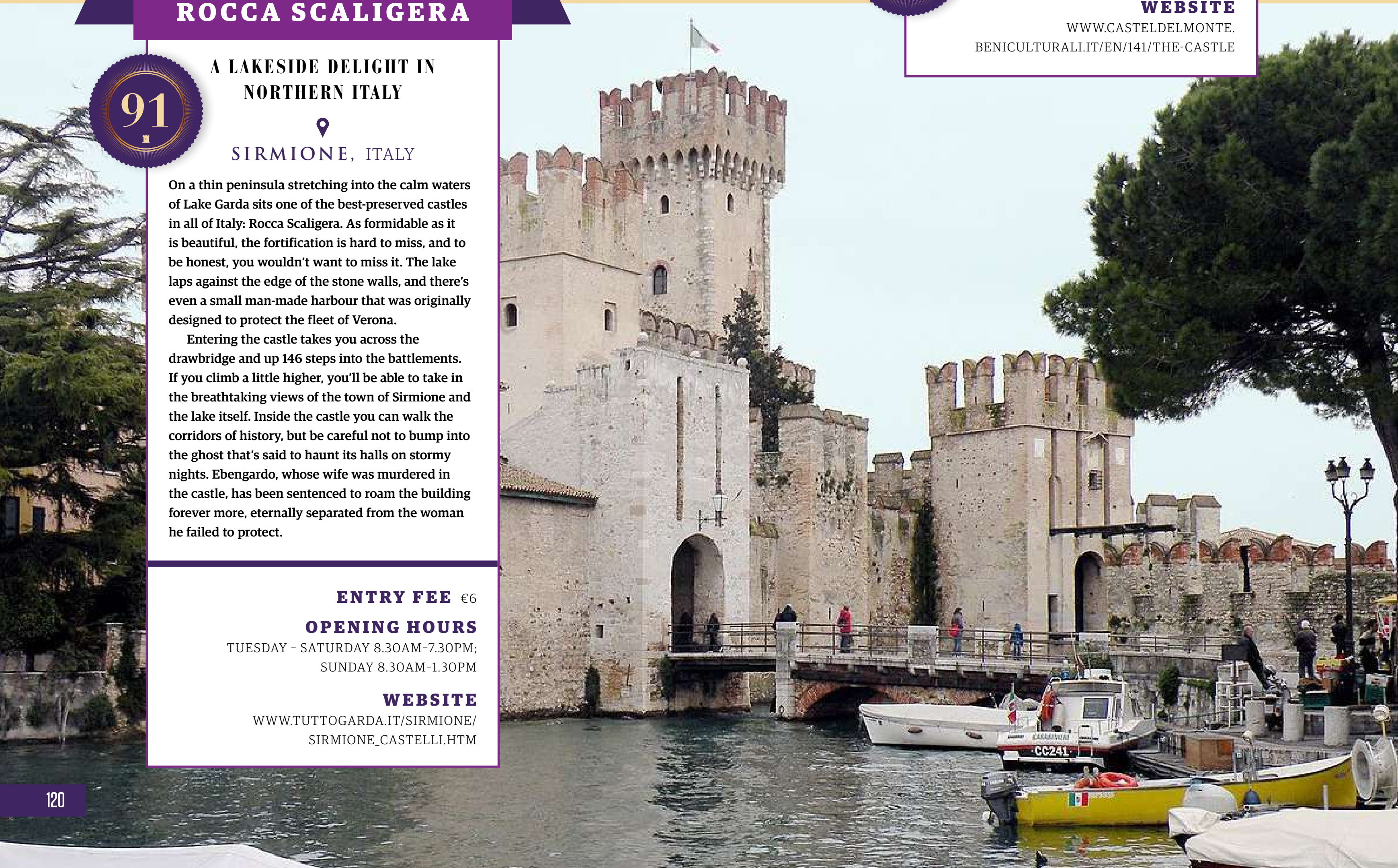
While it is in the middle of the countryside, this castle really can't be missed. If you're travelling to Apulia, make sure this stunning piece of architecture and history is added to your list.

90

ENTRY FEE
ADULT €10; REDUCED €3.50

OPENING HOURS
OCTOBER – MARCH 9AM-6.30PM;
APRIL – SEPTEMBER 10.15AM-7.45PM

WEBSITE
WWW.CASTELDELMONTE.BENICULTURALI.IT/EN/141/THE-CASTLE



ROCCA SCALIGERA

91

A LAKESIDE DELIGHT IN NORTHERN ITALY

SIRMIONE, ITALY

On a thin peninsula stretching into the calm waters of Lake Garda sits one of the best-preserved castles in all of Italy: Rocca Scaligera. As formidable as it is beautiful, the fortification is hard to miss, and to be honest, you wouldn't want to miss it. The lake laps against the edge of the stone walls, and there's even a small man-made harbour that was originally designed to protect the fleet of Verona.

Entering the castle takes you across the drawbridge and up 146 steps into the battlements. If you climb a little higher, you'll be able to take in the breathtaking views of the town of Sirmione and the lake itself. Inside the castle you can walk the corridors of history, but be careful not to bump into the ghost that's said to haunt its halls on stormy nights. Ebengardo, whose wife was murdered in the castle, has been sentenced to roam the building forever more, eternally separated from the woman he failed to protect.

ENTRY FEE €6

OPENING HOURS
TUESDAY – SATURDAY 8.30AM-7.30PM;
SUNDAY 8.30AM-1.30PM

WEBSITE
WWW.TUTTOGARDA.IT/SIRMIONE/SIRMIONE_CASTELLI.HTM

92

CASTELLO ARAGONESE D'ISCHIA

THE FORTRESS ON AN ISLAND IN THE SUN

ISCHIA, ITALY

How many castles have their own islands? One of the few is Castello Aragonese in Italy's Bay of Naples. Stunning to look at as it cascades down the side of a rocky crag, this site is almost 2,500 years old. In the Middle Ages it was owned by the Aragonese royal family and finally, in 1441, the bridge that connects the island to the mainland was constructed. Castello Aragonese is drenched in history thanks to its strategic position, and visitors today can glimpse its exciting past. The fortress has been a prison, a family seat, a battlefield - there's so much more to uncover.

ENTRY FEE
ADULTS €10; CHILDREN €6

OPENING HOURS
9AM-SUNSET

WEBSITE
WWW.CASTELLOARAGONESEISCHIA.COM/EN

93

CASTELLO DI FÉNIS

A UNIQUE WONDER IN THE AOSTA VALLEY

FÉNIS, ITALY

Imposing walls and towers are what first greet you when you approach Castello di Fénis, but any idea of menace is lost with the towering Alps in the background. This small fortified complex sits in the Aosta Valley, less than an hour's drive from Mont Blanc, surrounded by green fields at the foot of Europe's most famous mountain range.

Built in the 13th century, the castle was expanded over time by the Challant family, a local noble family that ruled the area. With a lavish courtyard, guards' quarters, dining room and enormous kitchen, Fénis also has something that a lot of other castles don't: a tax collecting room, for that was one of the building's main functions. But don't let its perhaps dull former function put you off - it's certainly worth a visit for its unique beauty and the 15th-century fresco of Saint George bravely slaying a dragon.

The only way to visit the castle is on a guided tour, but it's certainly worth the trip. Just a stone's throw from Aosta and little over an hour from Turin, it would be a shame to miss out on this gem in the valley.

ENTRY FEE
ADULTS €7; CHILDREN €2

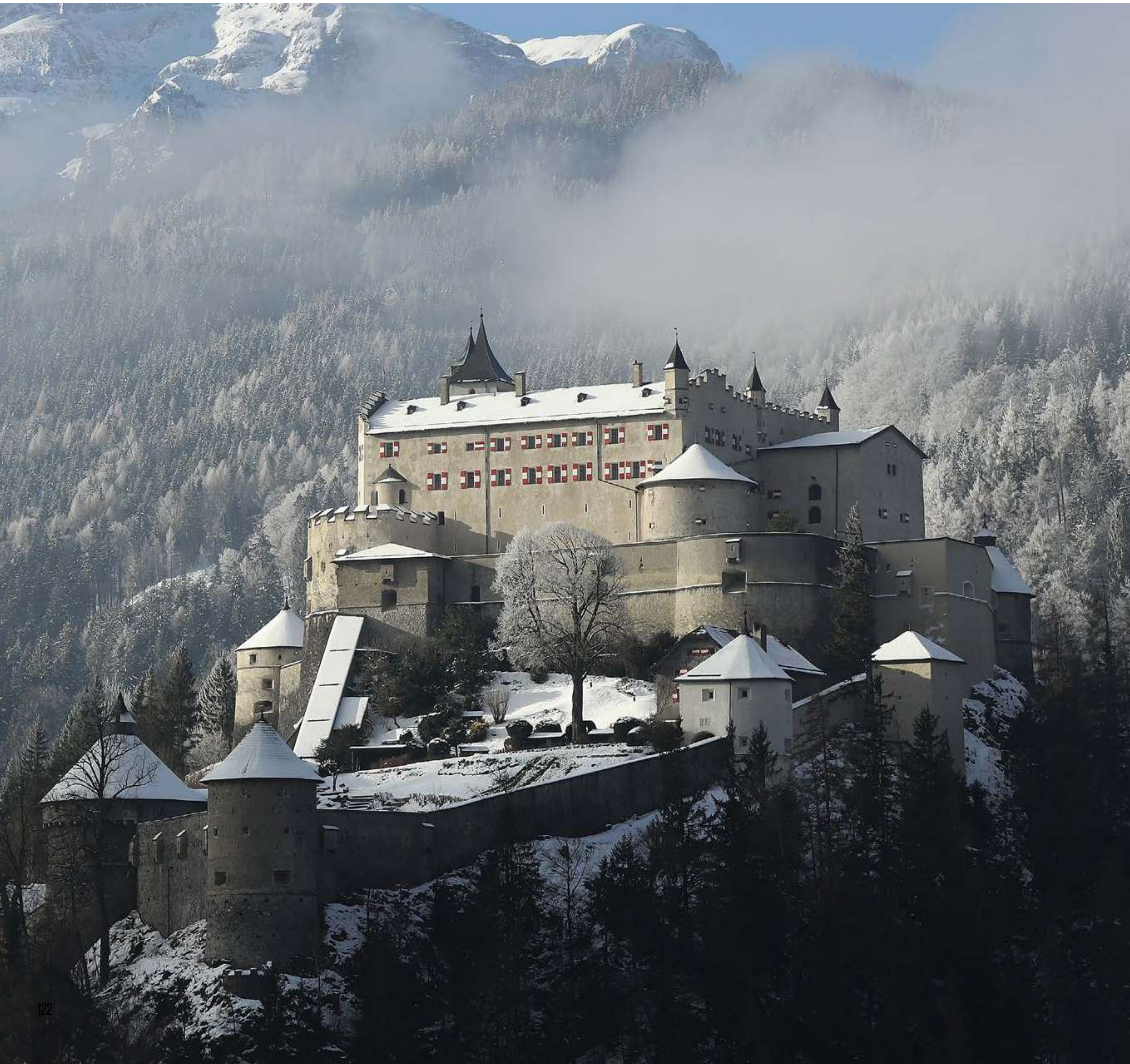
OPENING HOURS
APRIL - SEPTEMBER 9AM-7PM; OCTOBER - MARCH TUESDAY - SUNDAY 10AM-1PM, 2PM-5PM

WEBSITE
WWW.LOVEVDA.IT/EN/DATABASE/8/CASTLES-AND-TOWERS/FENIS/FENIS-CASTLE/979

NUMBER

94

WERFEN
AUSTRIA



ENTRY FEE
ADULTS €16.50; CHILDREN €9.50

OPENING HOURS
9.45AM–5.45PM

WEBSITE
WWW.SALZBURG-BURGEN.AT/EN/HOHENWERFEN-CASTLE

HOHENWERFEN CASTLE

Influenced by the great 16th-century Italian castles, some of Hohenwerfen's buildings date back to the 11th century. It was then purchased in 1898 by an archduke who turned it into a stately home. In World War II it was used as a military training centre by the Nazis, and from 1945 to 1987 it was taken over by Salzburg's police school. Today, it is visited by tourists from all around the world, and it promises an interesting day out in the Alps, under an hour's drive from Salzburg.

101 WORLD'S GREATEST CASTLES

AMONG THE RUINS

GO BACK TO HISTORY'S MOST TURBULENT TIMES BY VISITING THE GHOSTS OF GREAT CASTLES

There's something oh-so-mystical about a castle in ruins. Whether it's the promise of past glory, or the thrilling tale of how the building was destroyed in the first place, ruined castles are some of the most atmospheric locations in the world. From battlements on the edge of pristine beaches, to fortresses almost completely reclaimed by nature, you'll find there are plenty of mystical ruins to explore. Soak up the feeling of being somewhere with a unique, exciting story, or use the ruins as the perfect backdrop to an intriguing Instagram post - you won't regret spending a day at the remains of these amazing castles.

WORDS BY • ALICE BARNES-BROWN

Corfe Castle also has a heritage railway that passes at the foot of the castle

95

CORFE CASTLE

DISCOVER THE IMPACT OF THE ENGLISH CIVIL WAR ON THIS SEAT OF ROYALIST POWER – AND THE FORMIDABLE WOMAN WHO LIVED IN IT

DORSET
UK

In the heart of the chocolate-box village of Corfe stands Corfe Castle, the towering ruins of a Norman fortress. Corfe Castle was one of the first castles in England to be built using stone, and the grey rocks of the castle have kept it standing for more than a thousand years.

Throughout the Medieval period, Corfe was hugely important to Britain's ruling dynasties. It was one of five royal castles, and King John (who ruled from 1199 to 1216) secreted his crown jewels there. Queen Elizabeth I sold the castle, and it soon ended up in the hands of the Bankes family. During the Civil War, Mary Bankes defended the castle while it was under siege for three years, until she was betrayed by one of her own men. The castle was then blown up from the inside by the Parliamentarians.

Nowadays, the best time to visit Corfe is a crisp Autumn morning, while the village sleeps - you'll be treated to an incredible view of the ruins rising out of the mist. There are also plenty of events and battle re-enactments happening in the castle grounds, so you can really get into the medieval spirit. Treat yourself to a proper Dorset cream tea in the National Trust tea room at the end of your day.

ENTRY FEE
£10

OPENING HOURS
10AM-6PM

WEBSITE
WWW.NATIONALTRUST.ORG.UK/CORFE-CASTLE

FRANGOKASTELLO

THIS JAW-DROPPING CASTLE RUIN IN SUNNY SOUTHERN CRETE IS PERFECT FOR A FAMILY DAY OUT

CRETE
GREECE

In the laid-back south of the island of Crete is Frangokastello – a real-life sand castle. When the Venetians occupied Crete in the Middle Ages, they struggled to keep a hold on the rebellious island. Besides the island's naturally fierce Greek population, they also had to contend with piracy and banditry. So, in the 1270s, Frangokastello was built on the beach to watch out for pesky pirates. Yet, rumour has it that a group of rebels, led by the Patsos brothers, went to the castle every night to destroy what the Venetians had constructed. When it was finally completed, the locals gave it the derogatory nickname of Frangokastello – meaning "Castle of the Catholic Foreigners" (well, Franks). The name stuck.

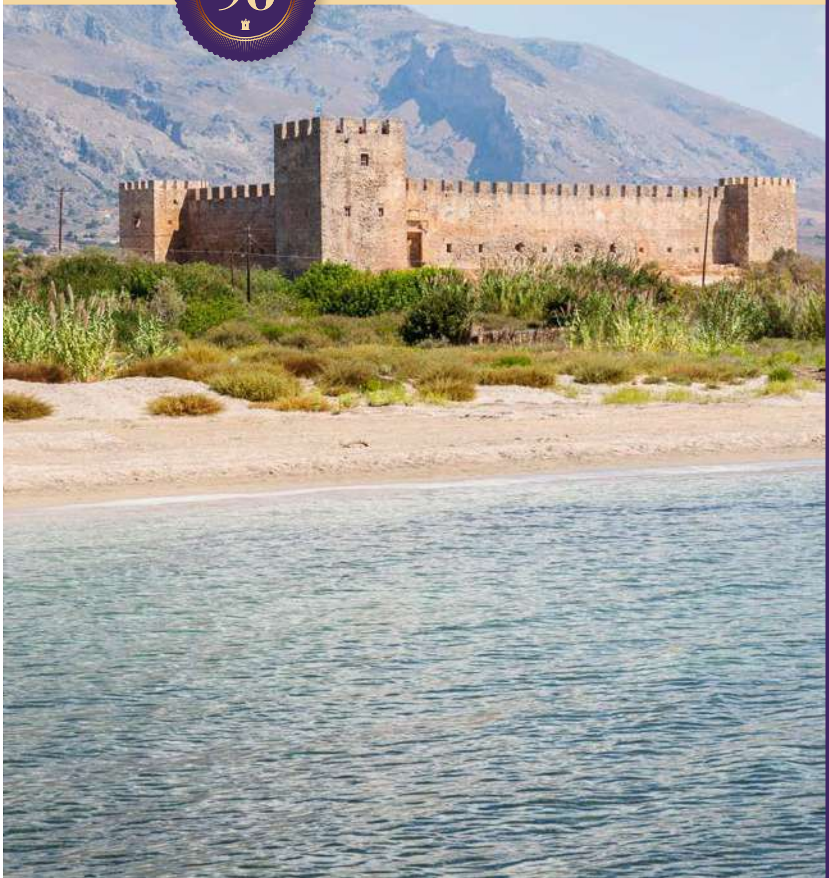
750 years later, the outer shell of Frangokastello remains, as well as a few scattered foundations of interior buildings. Once you've had your fill exploring the castle, you can relax on the sandy beach. With its azure waters and gently sloping shallows, the beach at Frangokastello is not to be missed. Swim in the waters pirates once ruled, and admire the view of the Venetian fortress the Cretan bandits themselves would once have scoffed at.

ENTRY FEE
€2

OPENING HOURS
MAY – OCTOBER 9AM-7PM

WEBSITE
WWW.EXPLORECRETE.COM/CRETE-WEST/EN-FRANGOKASTELLO.HTML

96



97

GOLCONDA FORT

THIS QUTB COMPLEX OCCUPIES AN ENTIRE HILL, AND ONCE MONITORED HYDERABAD'S LAVISH DIAMOND TRADE

HYDERABAD
INDIA

Thanks to the Muslim Qutb dynasty, what began as a simple mud fort ended the 16th century as a massive granite complex, with its outer walls stretching five kilometres. Not only that, but the fortress had iron spikes on its gates to deter war elephants, and the acoustics of the fort were engineered so that even the smallest sound could be heard across the entire complex.

But why were the Qutb sultans so keen to guard this seemingly nondescript area? The answer lies in the earth. Hyderabad was once known as the heart of the world's diamond trade, later Queen Victoria's 'Jewel in the Crown'. The fortress was close to the massive Gollur diamond mine, and once held the Koh-i-Noor and the Hope diamonds in its vaults. The people living and working at Golconda would have ensured the diamond trade was not threatened by external powers.

However, towards the end of the 17th century, the Golconda fort was besieged by the invading Mughal dynasty, and it fell into disrepair. Nowadays, it's one of the top attractions in Hyderabad, offering dazzling panoramic views over the entire city. When night falls, a sound and light show (in English) illuminates the palace, telling the story of the castle.

ENTRY FEE
INDIANS ₹15; FOREIGNERS ₹200

OPENING HOURS
8AM-5.30PM

WEBSITE
WWW.HYDERABADTOURISM.TRAVEL/GOLCONDA-FORT-HYDERABAD

98

SPIŠ CASTLE

VISIT ONE OF EUROPE'S MIGHTIEST CASTLES – ONCE THE SEAT OF KINGS, BEFORE IT WAS GUTTED BY FIRE

ŽEHRA
SLOVAKIA

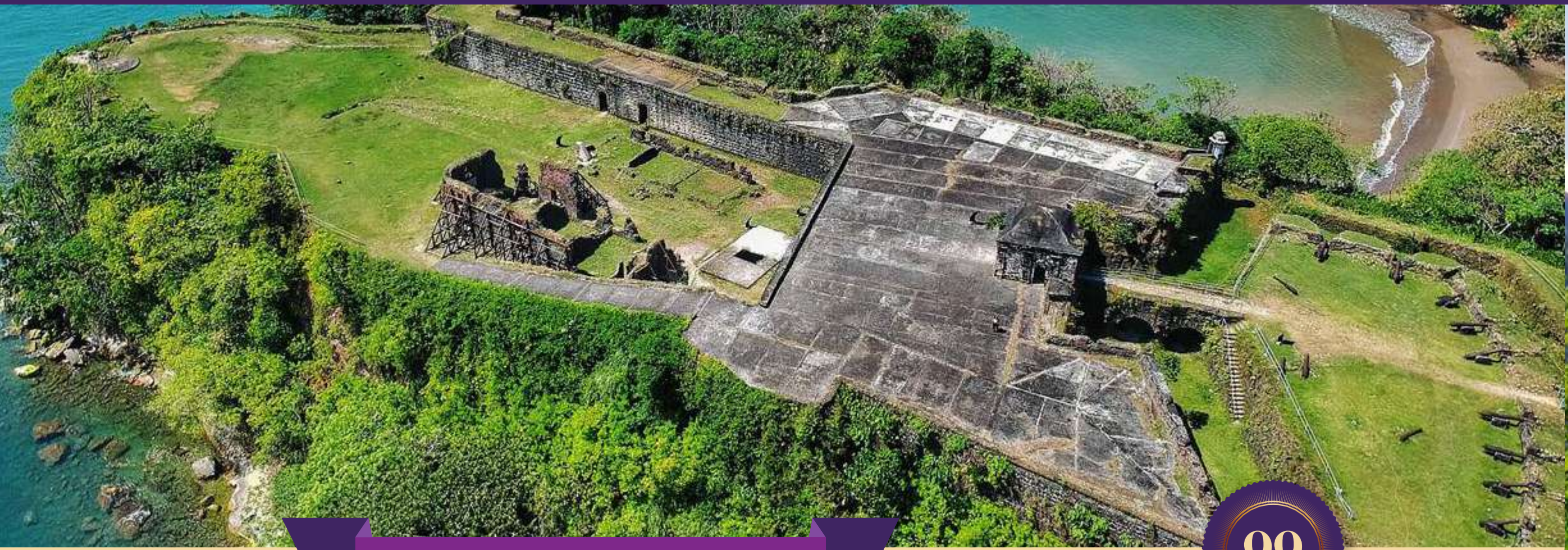
Back in the 12th century, when Slovakia was part of the Hungarian empire, the kings of Hungary built this impenetrable fortress. Spiš Castle soon grew in importance, and before long, was the seat of power for the entire region. And what a castle it was - the main buildings were a two-storey Romanesque palace, plus a large Gothic church with three naves. All of this was guarded by a stone wall, which managed to withstand raids from invading Tartars in 1241. Within the walls, kings would have lived, worked, prayed and dined lavishly. However, in 1464, the Hungarian ruling dynasty sold off the castle to a powerful family, the Zápolya clan, who transformed Spiš into a luxurious aristocratic home.

The castle passed through different owners over the years, until the last ones - the Csáky family - vacated the premises in the early 1700s. Then, in 1780, a mysterious fire erupted, leaving the castle in ruins. Some say it was an accident, but some say the Csáky clan burnt it down to avoid paying the building's taxes. Whatever the truth, Spiš Castle is still worth a visit - a hilltop bastion of power for the former Hungarian Empire.

ENTRY FEE
ADULTS €8; CHILDREN €4

OPENING HOURS
APRIL - SEPTEMBER 9AM-6PM;
OCTOBER 9AM-4PM

WEBSITE
WWW.SPISSKYHRAD.COM/ENGLISH/SPIS-CASTLE



99

FORT SAN LORENZO

AN ABANDONED VILLAGE IS ALL THAT REMAINS OF THIS PIVOTAL COLONIAL TRADING POST

COLÓN
PANAMA

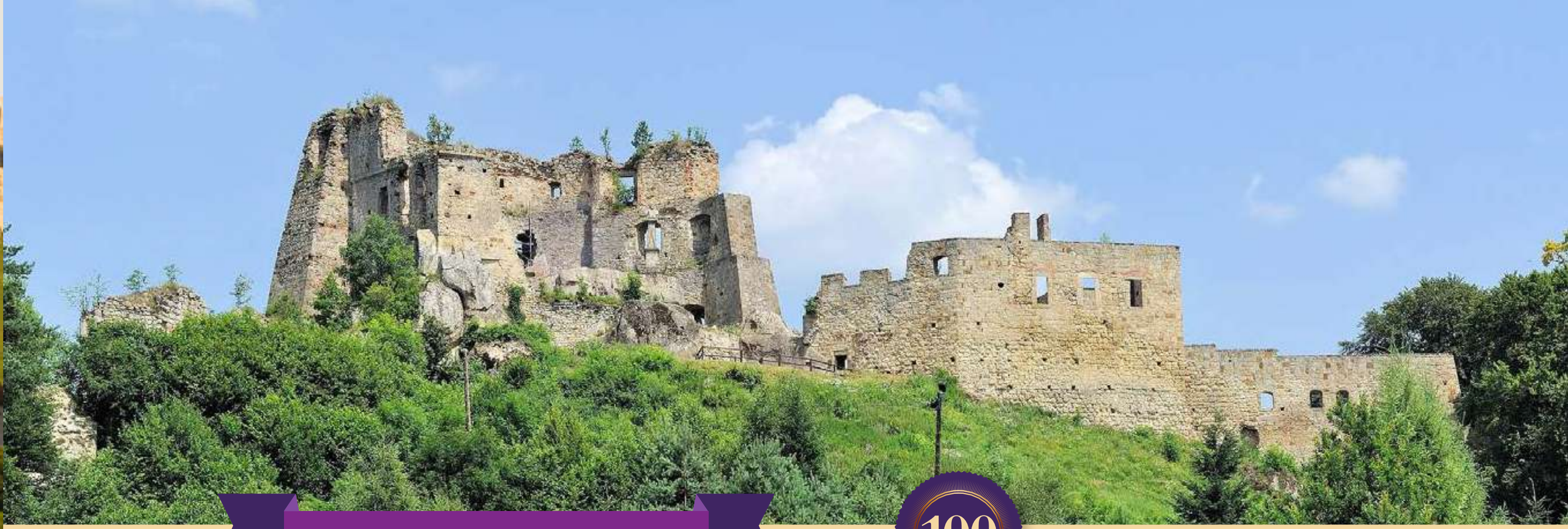
Panama has long been key to trade, and the fort that existed at San Lorenzo protected gold that the Spanish monarchy transported over Panama's territory from pirates. Sheltered by the fort's watchful gaze, a town, Chagres, sprang up. The 17th century was an exciting time for the fort and town; British privates and the navy often attacked the fortress, hoping to get their hands on the gold. However, the Spanish would not be defeated, and rebuilt the fort a number of times.

Chagres and Fort San Lorenzo slowly faded from importance, the death knell sounding with the opening of the nearby Panama Canal. The present ruins date from the 18th century, and the beautiful overgrown fortifications are fantastic to explore.

ENTRY FEE
$5

OPENING HOURS
8AM-4PM

WEBSITE
WHC.UNESCO.ORG/EN/LIST/135/



100

KAMIENIEC CASTLE

CASIMIR THE GREAT'S CASTLE TAKES CENTRE STAGE IN A FAMOUS POLISH COMEDY

ODRZYKOŃ
POLAND

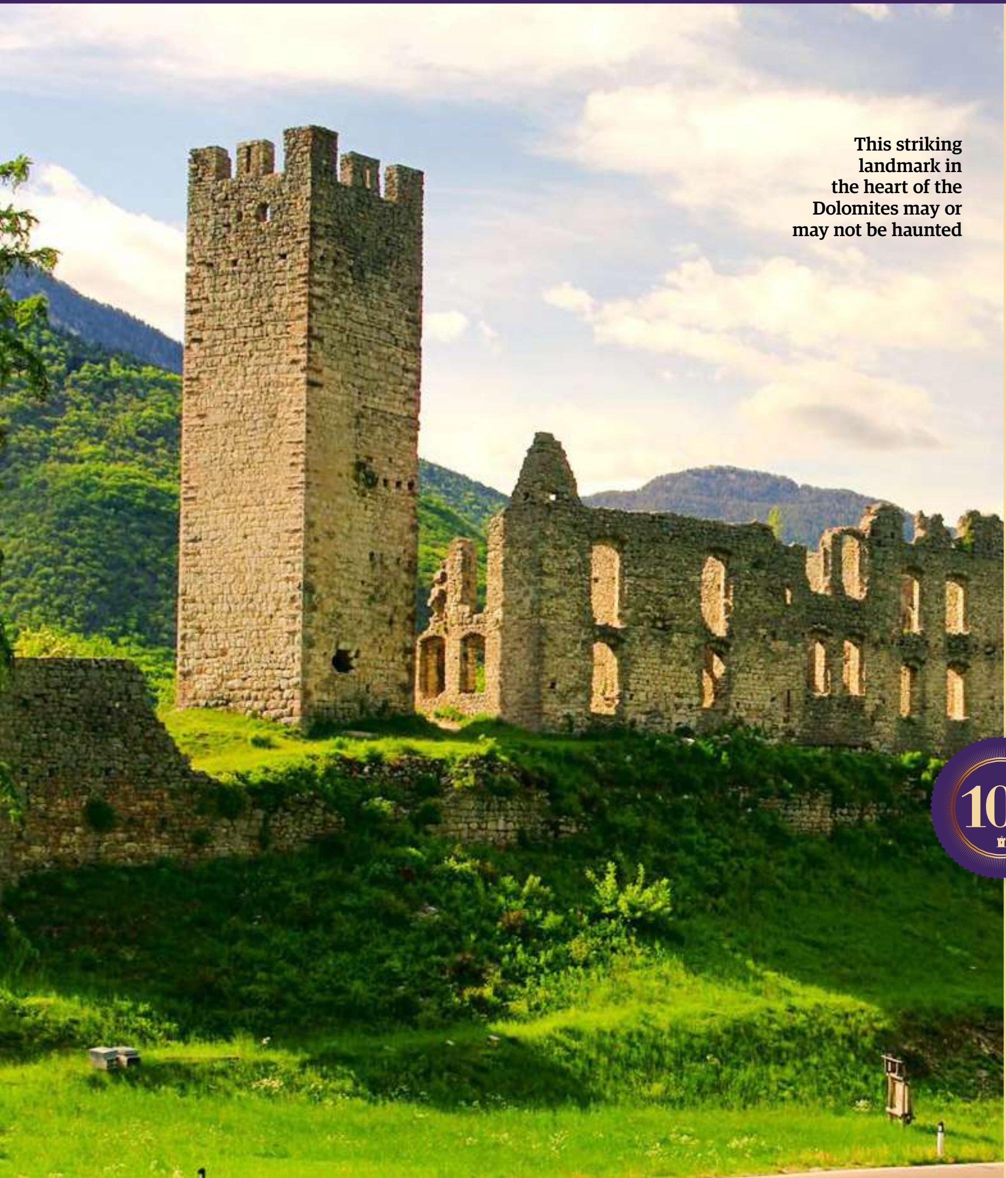
This 14th century castle was handed down through many families in the Middle Ages, but none were as troublesome as the Skotnicki family. This bunch owned the upper castle at Kamieniec, while their rivals, the Firlej family, owned the middle castle. In the 17th century, Jan Skotnicki rebuilt his, but designed the roof in such a way that rain would pour into the Firlej courtyard down below. They bickered incessantly for the next few decades, until a marriage between the two families in 1638 settled matters. The quarrels were immortalised by Polish author Alexksander Fredro in *Zemsta* - or, in English, 'The Revenge'.

Today, you can see what remains of the upper and middle castles

ENTRY FEE
8 ZŁOTY

OPENING HOURS
9.30AM-6:30PM

WEBSITE
WWW.VISITKROSNO.PL/EN/MIEJSCA/THE-KAMIENIEC-CASTLE



This striking landmark in the heart of the Dolomites may or may not be haunted

101

CASTEL BELFORT

EXPLORE THE BATTLEMENTS OF THIS EARLY MODERN CASTLE IN THE DRAMATIC ITALIAN DOLOMITES

SPORMAGGIORE
ITALY

A castle has existed on this sharp landscape - near the city of Trento - since 1311. A fire in the 1700s completely destroyed the original castle, though, so the ruins you see today are actually the ruins of an 18th-century construction by the Saraceni family - and, as such, it looks rather modern in its appearance.

The Saracenis' castle was abandoned in the Napoleonic era, but one person remains - allegedly, the ghost of Cristoforo Altspur, a 15th-century noble who went mad. Suffering from paranoia, he tried to kill his wife, as he thought she was unfaithful. Legend has it his ghost still drifts through the castle, searching for evidence of her infidelity. Be careful not to bump into him as you explore - he's an infamously vengeful spirit.

ENTRY FEE
FREE

OPENING HOURS
ALL YEAR ROUND

WEBSITE
WWW.TRENTINO.COM/EN/HIGHLIGHTS/CASTLES/CASTEL-BELFORT

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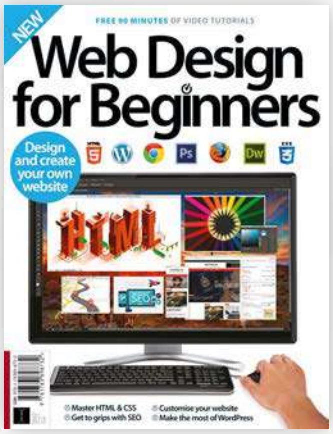
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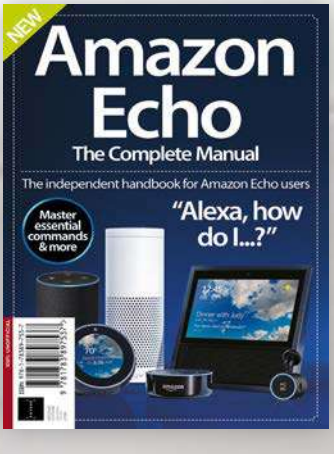
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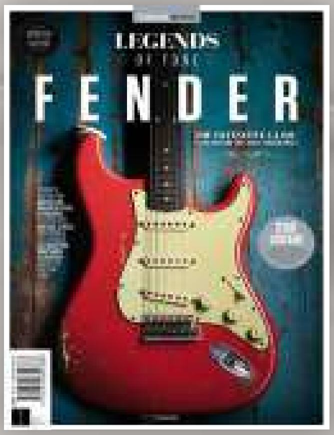
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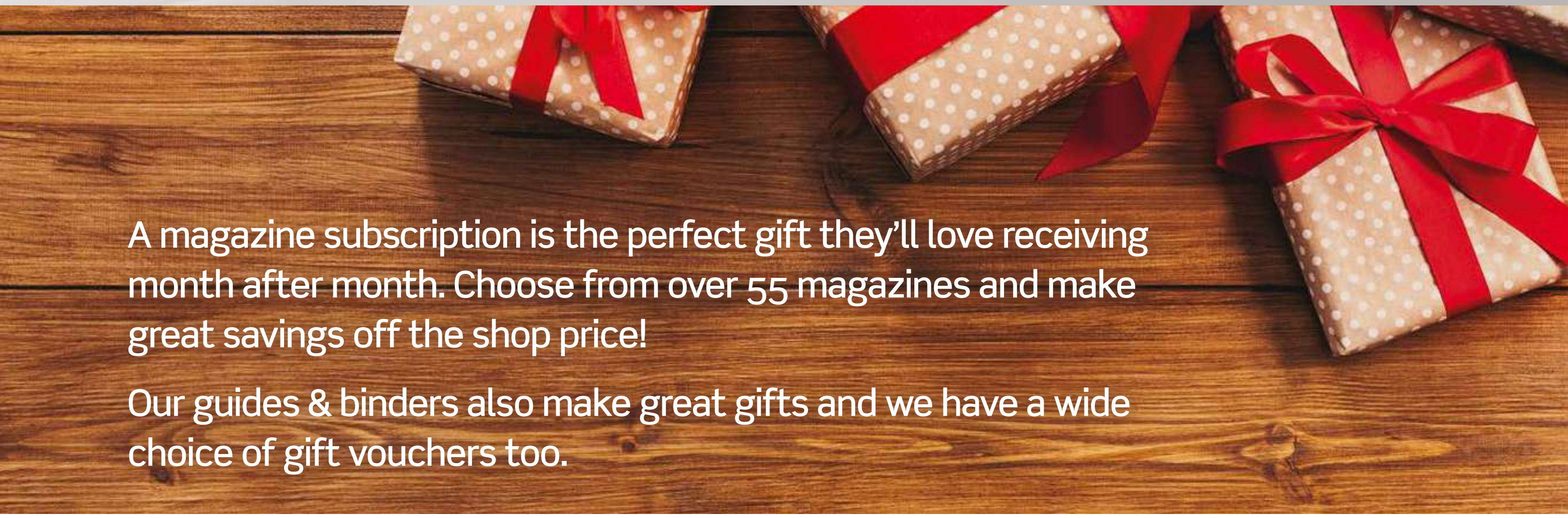
FENDER



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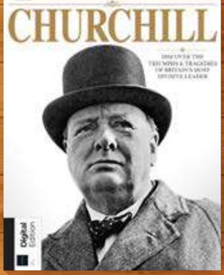

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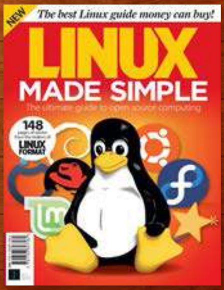
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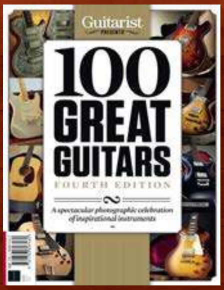
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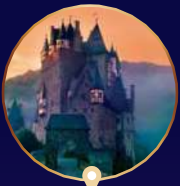

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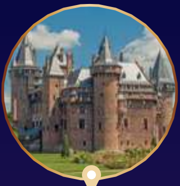

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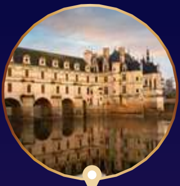

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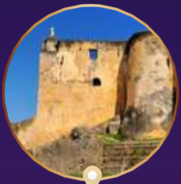

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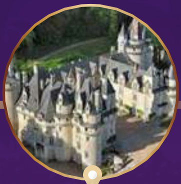

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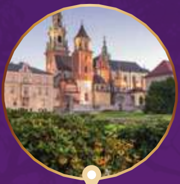

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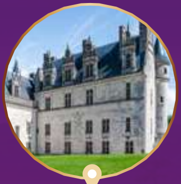

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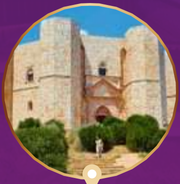

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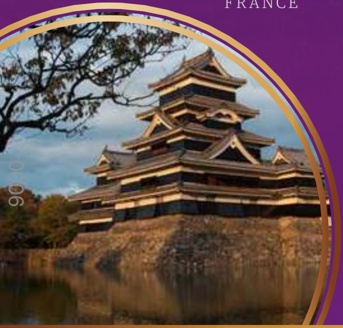

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